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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Mass Covid testing drive at Namthang

NAMCHI, 22 JUL (IPR): A COVID-19 mass testing drive was held at various places under Namthang today. The team from Namthang Primary Health Centre led by Medical Officer, In-charge, Namthang PHC, Dr Mingyur D Lassopa, Dental Surgeons: Dr Su-shmita Chettri and Dr Ayesha Chettri collected RT-PCR samples and did RAT as well. In Upper and Lower Passi villages under Rateypani Gram Panchayat Unit a total of 17 RATs were conducted out of which 14 were detected as positive whereas 209 RT-PCR samples were collected.

At khorlang village under Tanzi-Bikmat Gram Panchayat Unit the team collected a total of 14 RT-PCR samples. They also did 04 RATs out of which 03 people were detected as positive.

Overall the team today collected a total of 223 RT-PCR samples and conducted 23 Rapid Antigen Tests of which two were done at Namthang Primary Health Centre and one person was detected positive.

41,383 fresh Covid cases in India, marginally lower than yesterday

NEW DELHI, 22 JUL [NDTV]: India added 41,383 new coronavirus cases over the last 24 hours while deaths from COVID-19 rose by 507. The country's overall case load now stands at 3.12 crore, while total fatalities are at 4.18 lakh, according to the health ministry. India's test positivity rate (positive cases identified for every 100 tests) continues to decline. For the 31st straight day it is below the 5 per cent-mark at 2.12 per cent.

About 2,224 active cases were reported in the last 24 hours to take the tally to 4.09 lakh. About 3.04 crore people have recovered across the country so far, taking the recovery rate to 97.35%. Over 20 lakh vaccine doses were administered in the last 24 hours. The total doses administered in the country have exceeded 41.76 crore so far, the health ministry said.

Kerala contributed 17,481 cases to the country's daily numbers. It was followed by Maharashtra (8,159 cases).

For the first time, three different variants of COVID-19 - Delta, Alpha and Beta - have been detected among 75 coronavirus cases in Mizoram, health officials said. The samples were sent for genome sequencing to the National Institute of Biomedical Genomics (NIBMG), Kalyani in West Bengal in June this year.

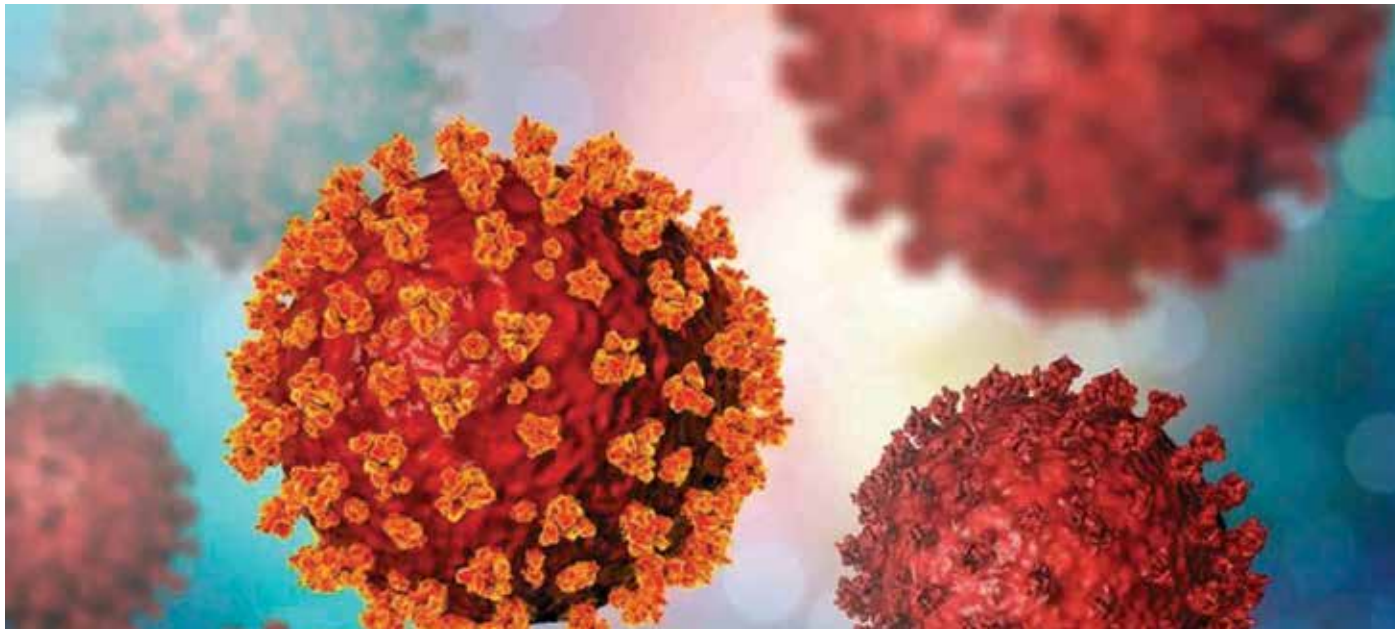
Sikkim records 250+ new cases for second consecutive day, week's count 1000+ already

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JUL:

Sikkim registered 250+ new cases for the second consecutive day today and for the third time in the past four days when 294 fresh cases of Covid-19 were confirmed in data released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department this morning. The State had recorded 251 new cases on 21 July, 147 on 20 July and 257 on 19 July. Before this, the last time that Sikkim had breached the 250-mark was on 10 June, 2021 when 287 new cases had been reported.

Since Sunday, Sikkim has picked up 1,104 new cases of Covid and seen seven more deaths. A total of 5,881 tests have been conducted since 18 July giving an average test positivity rate of nearly 19% for the five days in question.



As per the Daily Report of Covid-19 in Sikkim released by the IDSP cell, the 294 new cases were detected from the screening of 1,658 samples yesterday, giving Sikkim a

daily case positivity rate of 17.70% for the past 24 hours. Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 now stands at 24,341.

Out of the 294 new cases, 139 were registered in East

District, 47 in West District, 90 in South District and 18 in North District.

In the meantime, Sikkim's Covid toll increased to 328 with two more COVID deaths

reported from STNM hospital.

Of the new cases, 172 were found in RT-PCR testing of 979 samples while 119 people tested positive for COVID-19 in rapid antigen

testing of 670 samples and three more cases were detected in TruNat testing of nine samples.

While the number of new cases was close to 300, hospitals here saw only 10 more admissions with the rest apparently with symptoms mild enough not to require hospitalization.

Of the 2,719 active cases of Covid in the State at present, only 104 are in hospital and the rest are recuperating under home or facility isolation. Eleven of the COVID patients in hospital are currently admitted in ICU.

On the other hand, Sikkim's count of recovered cases crossed the 21,000-mark today and stands at 21,030 with 189 COVID patients making full recoveries in the last 24 hours and returning to their regular lives.

Dalai Lama's advisers were on list of potential Pegasus targets: Report

NEW DELHI, 22 JUL [NDTV]:

The closest advisers of the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, have been found on the list of potential surveillance targets with the Israeli spyware Pegasus that is only sold to governments, news website The Wire reported on Thursday.

Phone numbers of staff of other Buddhist clerics, several Tibetan officials and activists were also found on a leaked database that showed they had been marked for being monitored from late 2017 to early 2019, the publication said.

The inclusion of their phone numbers, however, may not mean that they have been infected by Pegasus, as that can only be confirmed through forensic analysis of the device, it added.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, political strategist Prashant Kishor, Union Ministers and dozens of journalists were found on the list of targets earlier this week in the scandal that has been dubbed "bigger than Watergate" by the opposition and strenuously dismissed by the government.

According to The Wire, the first records of surveillance on those around the Dalai Lama relate to the staff of the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Urgyen Trinley Dorji, the third highest-ranking monk in Tibetan Buddhism, who had been living outside India since early 2017.

The Karmapa, who fled to India in 2000 as a teenager, has had a testy relationship with the Indian intelligence community; In March 2018,

he obtained a Dominican passport, unbeknownst to India, the news website reported.

The Dalai Lama's long-term envoy in New Delhi, Tempa Tsering, who is currently the director, India and East Asia, Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi, also appears on the list, it said.

During the period when the phones were selected for surveillance, the Dalai Lama had met with former US President Barack Obama in Delhi and India's relationship with China was just recovering following the Doklam crisis.

"Other names in the database are of senior aides Tenzin Taklha and Chimmey Rigzen. The head of the trust that will oversee the delicate task of selecting the next Dalai Lama, Samdhong

Rinpoche, was also inserted in the list in mid-2018," The Wire reported.

The records also include the phone numbers of the head of the then Tibetan government in exile, Lobsang Sangay, and several other Tibetan activists in India, it said.

The Wire is among 17 media organisations that are publishing the investigation that says Pegasus had been used in attempted or successful hacks of smartphones using malware that enables the extraction of messages, records calls and secretly activates microphones.

The maker of the spyware NSO, which has said it sells its spyware to only "vetted governments", has rejected the reports as "full of wrong assumptions and uncorroborated theories". NDTV has not independently verified the reporting.



Fifth red panda birth in Darjeeling Zoo this year

SMRITAKHAWAS

DARJEELING, 22 JUL:

A Red Panda cub born in the Darjeeling Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park has become the fifth red panda to be born in the zoo this year. The zoo now has 26 red pandas.

"We are very happy to inform that today a Red Panda was born in Darjeeling. Both the mother and cub are healthy. This is the fifth red panda born in this zoo this year," said Director of Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park, Dharm Deo Rai.

Drikung Gyaltsay Charitable Trust donates hemodialysis and ADR machines to STNM Hospital

SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 22 JUL:

Drikung Gyaltsay Charitable Trust today donated a Computerized Hemodialysis Machine and an ADR Machine to STNM Hospital here at Sochaygang.

A dialysis machine filters a patient's blood to remove excess water and waste products when the kidneys are damaged, dysfunctional, or missing. An ADR Machine [Automatic Dialysis Reprocessing Machine] is the main device for hospitals to sterilize, clean, test and affuse reusable dialysis machines.

A delegation of the Trust's members handed over the equipment to the Medical Superintendent, STNM Hospital, Dr KB Gurung, here at his office on Thursday.




Drikung Gyaltsay Charitable Trust was formed on 11 February 2006 under the chairpersonship of Drikung Gyaltsay Rinpoche.

Today, the chief functionary of the Trust, SG Kaleon, explained that they were working on the vision of Drikung Gyaltsay Rinpoche and that towards this end, the Trust has constructed an Old Age

Home and Retreat Centre at Aho near Ranipool on land donated by Nam Nah Bhutia of Arithang, Gangtok.

The Old Age Home has 30 rooms with attached toilets and bathrooms and can accommodate 60 elderly people and was now ready for use.

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call for submissions

CONVERSE CHRONICLES

CONVERSE SIKKIM is pleased to announce its first publication showcasing writings from Sikkim entitled Converse Chronicles. It will be an anthology containing poems, short stories, essays and book excerpts. As such, entries are invited for possible inclusion from established and aspiring writers.

Mail in your entries at - converse.sikkim@gmail.com

General guidelines for both prose and poetry -

- The entries should be in Word (Document) format, mailed as an attachment with a small introduction of the writer, name and other relevant details.
- The subject of the mail should be - 'Entry For Converse Chronicles'
- Prose can be fiction/non-fiction/essays/narrative pieces.
- Word limit - 2000

Last date of submission - 10 August 2021

Centre refutes Covid death undercounting allegations

NEW DELHI, 22 JUL [PIB]: There have been some recent media reports alleging that India's toll of excess deaths during the pandemic could be in millions, terming the official COVID-19 death toll as 'vastly undercounted'.

In these news reports quoting findings from some recent studies, US & European countries' age-specific infection fatality rates have been used to calculate excess deaths in India based on the sero-positivity. The extrapolation of deaths has been done on an audacious assumption that the likelihood of any given infected person dying is the same across countries, dismissing the interplay between various direct & indirect factors such as race, ethnicity, genomic constitution of a population, previous exposure levels to other diseases and the associated immunity developed in that population.

Furthermore, the sero-prevalence studies are not only used to guide strategy and measures to further prevent the spread of infection to the

vulnerable population but are also used as another basis to extrapolate deaths. The studies also have another potential concern that the antibody titers may diminish over time, leading to underestimation of true prevalence and corresponding overestimation of Infection Fatality Rate. Further, the reports assume that all the excess mortality figures are COVID deaths, which is not based on facts and totally fallacious. Excess mortality is a term used to describe an all-cause mortality figure and attributing these deaths to COVID-19 is completely misleading.

India has a thorough contact tracing strategy. All the primary contacts, whether symptomatic or asymptomatic are tested for COVID-19. The true detected cases are the ones that test positive with RT PCR, which is the gold standard of COVID-19 test. In addition to the contacts, given the vast availability of more than 2700 testing laboratories in the country, anyone who wants

to get tested is able to get the test done. This coupled with vast IEC about the symptoms and access to medical care has ensured people could reach out to hospitals in case of need.

Given the robust and statute based Death Registration System in India, while some cases could go undetected as per the principles of Infectious Disease and its management, missing out on the deaths is unlikely. This could also be seen in the case fatality rate, which, as on 31st December 2020, stood at 1.45% and even after an unexpected surge observed in the second wave in April-May 2021, the case fatality rate today stands at 1.34%.

Moreover, the reporting of daily new cases and deaths in India follows a bottom-up approach, where districts report the number of cases & deaths to the State Governments and to the Union Ministry on a continuous basis. As early as May 2020, to avoid inconsistency or confusion in the number of deaths being

reported, Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) issued 'Guidance for appropriate recording of COVID-19 related deaths in India' for correct recording of all deaths by States/UTs as per ICD-10 codes recommended by WHO for mortality coding.

In his statement in Rajya Sabha yesterday, Shri Mansukh Mandaviya, Union Minister of Health & Family Welfare has refuted allegations of hiding COVID-19 deaths and said that the Central government only compiles and publishes data sent by the state governments.

The Union Health Ministry has been repeatedly advising States and UTs through formal communications, multiple video conferences and through deployment of Central teams for recording of deaths in accordance with laid down guidelines. The Health Ministry has also regularly emphasized the need for a robust reporting mechanism for monitoring district wise cases and deaths on a daily basis. States have been advised to conduct thorough

audits in their hospitals and report any cases or deaths that could have been missed with a district and date-wise details so as to guide a data-driven decision making. During the peak of the 2nd wave, the entire health system was focused on effective clinical management of cases requiring medical help, and correct reporting & recording could have been compromised which is also evident in a few states such as Maharashtra, Bihar & Madhya Pradesh reconciling their number of deaths recently.

In addition to this reporting, the robustness of statute based Civil Registration System (CRS) ensures all the births and deaths in the country get registered. The CRS follows process of data collection, cleaning, collating and publishing the numbers, which although is a long time-consuming process, but ensures no deaths are missed out. For the expanse and the amplitude of the activity, the numbers are usually published the next year.

Tax Raids at Dainik Bhaskar and UP-based TV Channel



NEW DELHI, 22 JUL [NDTV]: Income Tax raids took place at offices of the media group Dainik Bhaskar and an Uttar Pradesh-based news channel this morning. The Dainik Bhaskar group has been accused of tax evasion, say sources.

Some 100 taxmen searched around 30 locations of Dainik Bhaskar in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The homes and offices of the group's promoters were also raided.

A senior editor of Dainik Bhaskar told NDTV that raids were on at the group's Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Bhopal and Indore offices.

An Uttar Pradesh television channel, Bharat Samachar, was also raided. An Income Tax team searched the Lucknow office and also the editor's home to examine tax documents, according to sources.

The sources claimed the raids were based on "conclusive evidence of tax fraud" by the channel. Bharat Samachar's recent reporting has been critical of the UP government.

The opposition alleged that the raids were linked to reports on Covid "mismanagement" by the government.

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee called it a brutal attempt to stifle democracy.

"Through its reporting Dainik Bhaskar has exposed the Modi regime's monumental mismanagement of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is

now paying the price. An Undeclared Emergency as Arun Shourie has said - this is a Modified Emergency," tweeted Congress leader Jairam Ramesh.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot called it a brazen attempt to suppress the voice of the media.

One of the largest newspaper groups in the country, the Dainik Bhaskar was at the forefront of reporting on the scale of devastation in the second wave of Covid in April-May.

Dainik Bhaskar put out a series of reports that took a critical look at official claims during the pandemic as raging infections left people desperate for oxygen, hospital beds and vaccine.

Its reportage exposed the grisly sight of bodies of Covid victims floating in the river Ganga and washing up on the banks of towns in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, possibly discarded because of the lack of means to cremate them. The reports also revealed bodies buried in shallow graves by the river in UP.

The New York Times had, a month ago, published Dainik Bhaskar editor Om Gaur's op-ed on Covid deaths in India, titled: "The Ganges Is Returning the Dead. It Does Not Lie." The opinion piece was extremely critical of the government's handling of the coronavirus peak. The holiest of India's rivers "became Exhibit A for the Modi administration's failures and deceptions", he wrote.

Woman briefly arrested for WhatsApp post to "gift" beef to Himanta Sarma

Guwahati, 22 Jul [PTI]: A woman from a village in Assam's Nalbari district was briefly arrested for allegedly uploading an "objectionable post", proposing to "gift" cow meat to state Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, said the police.

"Yesterday a girl uploaded 'objectionable post' in her WhatsApp status. We have registered a case and arrested her. Later she was released on bail because it was a bailable offence," a top police official said.

It is the first such case of arrest after the state government tabled the Assam Cattle Preservation Act, 2021, to regulate illegal transportation of cattle and sale of beef in Assam. The Bill also proposes to forbid sale and purchase of beef in places predominantly inhabited by Hindu, Jain, Sikh and other non-beef eating communities or within a radius of 5 km of any temple.

The woman on Wednesday had uploaded a photo of a dead cow on her WhatsApp status and in the second picture,

she proposed to present the Chief Minister the meat of the animal.

"The girl had allegedly mentioned in her WhatsApp status to 'gift' a piece of beef to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. On Wednesday, Muslim community celebrated Eid Ul adha all over the world and such kind of 'objectionable post' meant for Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma will create disharmony among the two communities," said a police official.

The accused is the daughter of a former local BJP leader.

The Nalbari unit of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) filed a case for creating communal disharmony between the two communities.

"Such controversial post is an insult to the Hindu culture. We can't tolerate such attempts to insult our culture. The Hindus regard cow as sacred then how could she post such an 'objectionable post' in her WhatsApp status," said a member of Vishva Hindu Parishad.

No information on increase in child abuse cases due to Covid lockdowns: Centre

NEW DELHI, 22 JUL [PTI]: The government Thursday said it has no information as on date regarding data on increase in cases of child abuse due to the Covid-related lockdown situations and data on the increase in child marriage cases across the country due to financial difficulties caused due to coronavirus.

In a written reply in Rajya Sabha, Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani said her ministry has issued advisories and guidelines to state governments and union territory administrations for care and protection of children during the pandemic. "As per information provided by National Crime

Records Bureau (NCRB), there is no information as on date regarding data on increase in cases of child abuse due to the COVID-19 related lockdown situations and data on the increase in child marriage cases across the country due to financial difficulties caused due to Covid," she said.

Responding to another question, Minister Irani gave data on the number of complaints received and disposed of by NCPDR during the last five years.

According to the data, in the last five years from 2016-17 to 2020-21 the National Commission for Protection of Children received 50,857 complaints out of which 20,836 have been disposed of.

Governor calls on Baba Ramdev



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JUL:

Governor Ganga Prasad called on yoga guru Ramdev at Yog Gram, Haridwar, on Wednesday, a press release from Raj Bhawan informs.

During the courtesy call, the Governor also invited Baba Ramdev

to visit Sikkim in the near future.

The Governor presented a specially designed Om Thanka as a gift from the Sikkim Raj Bhavan to Baba Ramdev.

The release informs that the Governor is associated with Arya Samaj and gifts specially designed Om Thankas to dignitaries.

Later in the day, the Governor also met Acharya Balkrishna and visited the Patanjali Yogpeeth and Patanjali Research Institute in Haridwar.

The Governor appreciated their efforts towards Ayurveda and yoga as exemplary, the Raj Bhawan communiqué informs.

Fake invoicing racket of 338 Crore busted in Assam, 2 arrested

GUWAHATI, 22 JUL [NDTV]: A whopping ₹ 338 crore racket of fake invoicing has been unearthed by GST officials in a major bust of tax evasion scam in Assam.

According to a media statement, the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI), Guwahati Zonal Unit, said that a city-based businessman and a tax consultant were behind the scam.

The Additional General (ADG) of GST Intelligence in Guwahati Unit said Amit Kumar, owner of Maruti and tax consultant Sourav Bajoria have been arrested under several sections of the GST act.

The duo had also generated fake credit of Input tax (TTC) involving ₹ 28.97 crores of GST.

"Amit Kumar, was engaged in receipt and issuance of fake invoices of coal. The firm showed purchase of coal from Gujarat, Punjab and Delhi to his Guwahati unit to avail input tax credit (ITC) The unit subsequently issued invoices



to cement manufacturers, coke manufacturers, and other traders etc in northeast without supply of any goods. The fake invoices/bills of coal by the firm were used as cover document for the coal procured clandestinely and to pass on irregular ITC," the ADG said.

He also added that Amit Kumar had created two more fake entities by the same name Maruti Traders at Ludhiana and Gandhidham and showed business

transactions between these firms on paper without any supply of goods.

"This huge racket of fake invoicing involved other firms in Delhi, Punjab and Gujarat which were found to be non-existing," the official said.

On the role of the tax consultant the top official said, "He (Sourav Bajoria) colluded with Amit Kumar and caused the commission of the fraud. He was instrumental in dealing with trans-

actions for Amit. Sourav maintained the books of accounts, prepared the Financial Accounts and got the account audited and filed the GST returns pertaining to M/s Maruti Traders of Guwahati, Gujarat and Ludhiana which turned out to be non-existent entities during search."

Both the accused have been produced before the Chief Judicial Magistrate, Kamrup Metro and sent to 14 days judicial custody.

Drikung Gyaltsay...

Mr Kaleon mentioned that another vision of the Trust was to start its own dialysis unit but could not do so due to the pandemic and shortage of funds.

"Instead of starting a dialysis unit of our own which will take time, we decided to donate an ADR Machine and a Computerized Hemodialysis Machine to STNM Hospital," he said.

He informed that the Trust was also planning to donate an ADR Machine to Namchi District Hospital in the near future.

The Medical Superintendent thanked Drikung Gyaltsay Charitable Trust for their gesture to serve the people. He stated that a dialysis machine was much needed so this initiative will prove very beneficial to patients requiring dialysis.

He urged the Trust to continue such initiatives and help the hospital.

Likewise, Head of the Dialysis Department at STNM Hospital, Dr BN Sharma, mentioned that the donate equipment will be a great support to patients and added that sine the number of patients requiring dialysis was increasing in the State, many people are on the waiting list even after the unit works from 8 AM in the morning till around 10 PM and even later some times.

This additional machine will be very helpful to the hospital. He thanked the Trust for its magnanimous gesture for the needy people.

Drikung Gyaltsay Charitable Trust also has Justice SP Wangdi, TT Dorji and Keshu Chungyalpa as Trustees and Tashi Dadul Bhutia and Karma Geley Chungyalpa as Settlers.

CHANGE OF NAME

I, SAKILA TAMANG wife of No. 10375116NHAV SANGDUP LEPCHA of unit 107Inf Bn (TA) 11GR resident of Vill- SADAM BUSTY P.O. SADAM P.S. MELLI Dist- Namchi (SIKKIM) have changed my surname from SAKILA LEPCHA to SAKILA Tamang (Lepcha) vide affidavit dated 12/07/2021 before Disric Magistrate at Sub-Divisional Magistrate (HQ) Namchi, South Sikkim.

SOA welcomes hike in cash incentive for Olympic medal winners

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JUL:

Sikkim Olympic Association [SOA] has welcomed the announcement of the Sikkim Government enhancing cash incentives for medal winners in Olympics. The State Government has enhanced cash incentive to Rs 2.50 crore for gold medalist, Rs 1.50 crore for silver medalist and Rs 1 crore for bronze medalist.

A press release of SOA president, Kuber Bhandari states that the announcement of the State government brings cheer not only to athletes but also to all the sporting associations, coaches, parents and sports lovers of Sikkim. On behalf of Sikkim Olympic Association, he expressed his gratitude to the Chief



Minister, PS Tamang and Minister for Sports and Youth Affairs Department, KN Lepcha.

The release states that various interventions of the state government have been helping to develop club culture and to bring Olympic movement in the State. It lists out

interventions like: infrastructure development; inter-school competitions and sporting activities by Panchayati Raj Institutions; Junior Olympics; talent search programme; Coaches development programme; participation of the state team in national School Games

after a gap 14 years; and incentives to medal winners in north east and national and international championships.

Sports associations have now been receiving grants in aid regularly and sports quota has been enhanced from 2% to 5% which would help to motivate

youngsters to take games and sports as a profession.

Sikkim has produced only two Olympians so far, Arjuna Awardee Jaslal Pradhan in boxing and Arjuna Awardee and Padma Shri Tarundeep Rai in archery and with the holistic development and approach, we do hope that Sikkimese athletes would reach Olympic podium in the upcoming Olympics in 2024, 2028 and 2032, the release adds.

Sikkim Olympic Association has extended its best wishes to the Indian Contingent in Tokyo Olympics 2020 and further states, 'May the almighty give strength to Shri Tarundeep Rai to achieve medals in Tokyo Olympics'.

ICICI donates oxygen concentrators to Govt



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 22 JUL:

Extending support to Sikkim Government in its fight against Covid-19, ICICI foundation and ICICI Bank Ltd has

donated 41 Oxygen concentrators to the state.

ICICI Bank Regional head along with 3 Branch staff handed over the concentrators to Health Minister, Dr. M. K.

Sharma and UDHD Minister, Arun Kumar Upreti on Wednesday.

These concentrators will be distributed to 20 hospitals within the state of Sikkim, it is informed.

Covid may have claimed as many as 50 lakh lives in India: Experts

NEW DELHI, 22 JUL [NDTV]:

India's actual death count from Covid-19 could range between 1.3 million to a staggering 5 million, with even the most conservative estimate putting its tally at more than double the U.S., the highest recorded in the world so far.

The numbers, derived from research models and local authority data, range from three to 10 times the country's official count, adding to evidence that the true cost of the outbreak has been massively underreported.

As corpses floated in the Ganges, a river sacred to millions of Hindus, and crematoriums and graveyards were overwhelmed, skepticism grew over the death toll of around 420,000 recorded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, which has used the ostensibly low mortality rate to defend Covid track record.

Bloomberg approached authorities in about half of 28 states and territories seeking death data from April and May for the last two years and analyzed figures from researchers and experts. The result is clear: the real toll has been vastly underestimated because of a combination of under-counting, a backlog in the civil registration system and a lack of testing leading to Covid deaths being classified as other conditions like heart disease. The findings dovetail with estimates from researchers around the world. Bhramar Mukherjee, a professor at the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan, has devoted much of the past year to modeling pandemic. Her studies suggest the death toll is around 1.3 million up to June 15.

Rukmini S, a leading data journalist, has written that the numbers she's gathered suggest a death toll closer to 2.5 million.

A report from the Washington-based Center for Global Development think tank released Tuesday studied data from three different sources, finding that excess deaths - a term public health experts use to describe mortality from all causes during a crisis that is

above what would have been expected in 'normal' conditions - likely ranged between 3.4 million to 4.9 million.

"Regardless of source and estimate, actual deaths during the Covid pandemic are likely to have been an order of magnitude greater than the official count," said the report, co-authored by Arvind Subramanian, former chief economic adviser to the government and two other researchers. "True deaths are likely to be in the several millions, not hundreds of thousands, making this arguably India's worst human tragedy since partition and independence."

The federal Health Ministry in a July 14 press release called media reports on higher Covid death counts "speculative." Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya told Parliament Tuesday that "detailed guidelines for reporting of deaths have been issued by Union Health Ministry to all states and union territories." The ministry did not respond to written questions from Bloomberg.

Despite widespread reporting on oxygen shortages across India as the second wave of infections hit the country in April and May, the minister added that "no deaths due to lack of oxygen have been specifically reported" by local governments.

The states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Odisha combined have close to 300,000 excess deaths in the six months to June, according to all-cause mortality numbers analyzed by Bloomberg - more than 5.5 times their official Covid death data of about 53,000.

That already represents three-quarters of the official toll, though they are just four among 28 states and territories and 17% of the nation's 1.4 billion people.

State government officials say in most cases that people who had not been tested or had tested negative - but showed coronavirus symptoms - were not counted in the official toll. In rural areas, many people went untested, untreated and ultimately uncounted, contrary to federal government guidelines. At least six states did not respond to requests for all-cause death data.

BJP welcomes domicile grant to J-K women married outside

JAMMU, JUL 21 (PTI):

The BJP's Jammu and Kashmir unit on Wednesday welcomed the decision of domicile grant to native women married outside the Union Territory.

In a significant move, the Jammu and Kashmir administration on Tuesday had announced that it would issue a domicile certificate to the husband of a native woman.

"The NC, PDP and the Congress had been selling dreams of all sorts to people of Jammu and Kashmir since the past so many decades," J-K BJP president Ravinder Raina said.

"It was ironic to see that secessionist leaders who had married women from outside the country, including Pakistan,

had ensured state subject rights and status for them. But daughters of Jammu and Kashmir who were marrying people within India but outside the UT were losing all the rights in J-K," he said.

The Union Cabinet in 2020 had approved the Jammu and Kashmir (Adaptation of State Laws) Second Order, 2020 issued under section 96 of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019.

"We welcome the passage of J-K (adaptation of state laws) second order 2020, which seeks to grant domicile status to husbands of J-K women married outside," Raina said.

With the enactment of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act,

the idea of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' has been put into play, he said.

"All such anti-women, anti-youth, anti-people laws and arrangements have been put beneath the carpet. The families of women marrying outside have been made eligible for domicile status. This marks another milestone post August 5, 2019 in J-K history and the people of J-K, especially women, are upbeat and in high spirits," he said.

Raina expressed his sincerest thanks to the central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi as well the UT dispensation led by Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha.

Mamata Banerjee explains Khela Diwas date after BJP attack

NEW DELHI, 22 JUL [NDTV]:

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee today said she had chosen the date August 16 to observe Khela Diwas or Day of Sport as a mark of respect to sixteen football fans who died in a stampede during a football match on this day in 1980 at Kolkata's Eden Garden stadium.

Yesterday, in her annual Trinamool Martyrs' Day speech delivered virtually, she said she wanted to commemorate the slogan and the spirit it symbolised on this day. Coined by a young party leader, the slogan became an anthem in the Assembly poll campaign.

But today's explanation on why August 16 was chosen was possibly a response to criticism of her choice of date by Rajya Sabha MP Swapna Dasgupta, known to be close to the BJP.

Mr Dasgupta had yesterday tweeted that August 16 was the day the Muslim League launched its Direct-Action Day in 1946 that triggered the great Calcutta killings -- communal riots in which many lives were lost.

"In today's West Bengal, Khela Hobe has come to symbolise a wave of terror attacks on opponents. Interesting Mamata Banerjee has declared



August 16 as Khela Hobe Diwas," he said.

His tweet reinforced BJP claims of widespread post-poll violence in Bengal. The matter is in fact currently in Calcutta High Court.

"16 August used to be commemorated by many sporting clubs earlier. But that is dying out now. That's why we have chosen to mark Khela Hobe Diwas on August 16," Ms Banerjee said.

"In the coming days, Khela Hobe indeed. To protect civilization and culture, sports, the sporting spirit is very important. Those who are misinterpreting don't understand that spirit," Ms Banerjee said, adding, "Khela Hobe has become a theme across India. We are happy about that. So, we have fixed a day to celebrate the spirit."


On 16 August this year, the state's sports and youth department

will distribute one lakh footballs to sporting clubs across the state. 283 clubs of the Indian Football Association will get 10 footballs each. The rest will go to clubs in villages.

"50,000 'joyee' footballs have already been made by our mothers and sisters," the Chief Minister said. "Joyee" is the brand name of footballs being made by an NGO run by former footballers.

August 16 is also a day after Independence Day. "But our freedoms are being threatened today. We need to defend that. We need to fight for freedom of speech," Ms Banerjee added.

Yesterday, in her Martyrs' Day speech, Ms Banerjee had attacked the BJP and said, "Khela Hobe in many states and will continue till the BJP is ousted from power in the country."



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome. and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<h3>Treatment</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Toll free no. 104 ● District surveillance Officer ● EAST : 7029372100 ● WEST : 9593287808 ● NORTH : 9641957468 ● SOUTH : 7407691463 ● New STNM ● AMS : 9434711402

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

The Challenges of Being Local

Protections require deeper understanding, more empathy

Now that some public interest has been generated on local-nonlocal issues and the issues of belonging to Sikkim, the State should discuss the issue threadbare.

The Local-Nonlocal issue is an easy divide to tease; something that lazy politicians and even lazier agent provocateurs are wont to tickle often and whenever they feel the need to be noticed. With an election cycle arrive times of irrationally high aspirations, inflated senses of entitlement and shrinking opportunities, a refusal to share becomes an easy position to adopt. And while one may wish for society to be more open and accommodating, a refusal to be so, while unhealthy, is not necessarily illegal or unconstitutional. What is worrying however is when the public domain becomes occupied by voices which mistake protection to mean an exclusive club put together at the cost of denying others. For them, even some basic courtesies extended to those outside the club tantamount to dilution, and because those who understand the issues better do not speak up, noise routinely blanks out reason whenever such situations arise.

One sees such insular positions taken on a routine basis in locations as diverse as North India and the North East Region and even South of the Vindhyas where the local-nonlocal argument often collapses into violence. Most other times, it simmers below the surface, bubbling occasionally with distasteful remarks and inexcusably accepted offensive stereotyping. It is disturbing to see what appear to be sane, “educated,” mature and informed voices try and justify expressions of hate, but when appeals are made based on the belongingness of a people, such positions become difficult to avoid, even for the sane, educated, mature and the informed. Admittedly, irrational positions and shallow nationalism are not rare outpourings even in Sikkim, but the State has thus far been spared the ugliness of the more aggressive posturing or even sabre-rattling beyond the limited circulation of press conferences or the slightly wider, but socially limited, network of social media.

There is never room for complacency though because issues have a habit of occasionally growing unexpectedly big in Sikkim – the protest by truck drivers, the Rule 4(4) protection movement and the college students’ showdown in recent years for instance. Hence, it is advisable that the divisive Frankenstein of local-nonlocal positioning is not allowed to grow any larger in Sikkim. The best way to do this would be to address all related issues in an open manner. To begin with, Sikkim should also realise that in the issues related to Residential Certificates, the groups receiving these documents are nonlocal only as far as their status on official documents is concerned, as far as the social milieu is concerned, they have been part of the local mix for more than five decades now and widely accepted as such. What is also apparent is that they will not be claiming anything which is exclusively protected for the Sikkim Subjects and are essentially being extended gestures which allow them a more dignified access to rights they already enjoy.

But let us leave what privileges accrue to whom and whose share gets compromised for a later debate, for now, let’s extend the need for Sikkim to leverage such debates to discuss more issues more extensively and more openly. The quickness with which the Merger happened in 1975 and the short-sightedness with which several rules were drawn up and put into practice have led to situations which extend beyond just the demarcation of locals and non-locals in Sikkim. There is a staggered segregation even among the “locals” with official government notifications drawing up to five categories of people who can be issued Certificates of Identification and among these five categories are three groups which enjoy different levels of privileges even though they are all “Sikkimese”. Complicating matters further are existing ambiguities and nonexistent guidelines for officials on who is to be certified as what and for what purpose in Sikkim. Added to this whole mix is the literal interpretations of the English in rules, something which the grandchildren of non-locals who were in service of the Sikkim Government on or before 31 December, 1961 were shell-shocked by and what will cause dismay to the great grandchildren of Sikkim Subjects in less than a decade.

Too many complications have become rather vexed because they remained unaddressed for too long. Now, a situation has been created which has opened an opportunity to untangle the confusions. All that will be required will be for everyone to seek out transparency, fair-play and open minds. Invest these to the public debate and this will not be a very difficult problem to solve. And the “locals” will have to take the lead in opening such dialogues for it to have any durable results...

WRITE US:

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



Study finds lower antibody activity against delta variant at single dose – but vaccines still work

ZANIA STAMATAKI
theconversation.com

Chris Whitty, the chief medical officer for England, recently announced that the delta variant is no longer of concern because it now comprises 98% of new cases in the country and is therefore “the normal variant”.

This virus has spread to at least 90 countries and is 50% more transmissible than the alpha variant (the variant first identified in Kent), which is around 50% more transmissible than the original coronavirus that caused the pandemic.

With cases rising exponentially and restrictions lifted, it is important to understand how well the vaccines are faring against the delta variant.

A new study from the Pasteur Institute in France found that the delta variant is less sensitive to neutralising antibodies (the Y-shaped proteins that latch onto the coronavirus and stop it from entering our cells). The researchers compared three “variants of concern” – alpha, beta and delta – for their sensitivity to different sets of antibodies:

- antibodies used as drugs to treat people with COVID (monoclonals)
- antibodies from infected people six months after they recovered
- antibodies from vaccinated people who were previously infected
- antibodies from vaccinated people who had not been infected.

Monoclonal antibodies are engineered by pharmaceutical companies to target a single part of the spike protein. The researchers used four of these monoclonals to test the different viruses. The alpha variant continued to be neutralised by all four monoclonals. And the delta variant was neutralised

by three out of four. But the beta variant, which is known to be the most difficult to neutralise, had lost sensitivity to two out of four monoclonals.

Thankfully, our immune system makes a remarkable array of antibodies against different parts of the virus proteins. This is known as a “polyclonal response”. Do these polyclonal antibodies contain neutralising antibodies that prevent delta variant infection?

To find out, the researchers drew blood from a small group (56 people) six months after they recovered from COVID. They found a four to sixfold reduction in the neutralisation of the beta and delta variants compared with the alpha variant. This does not mean that people are more susceptible to infection with the new variants; immune protection is not merely defined by antibodies. However, it does mean that the beta and delta variants are sufficiently different from previous viruses to affect the immune response.

Encouragingly, when previously infected people were vaccinated (Pfizer, AstraZeneca or Moderna vaccines), they all showed an increase in neutralising antibodies against all three variants. A single dose of vaccine was enough to boost neutralising responses to the delta variant.

These findings chime with recent work from the University of Oxford and Public Health England (PHE), and with studies that have yet to be published.

The results were not so encouraging for those who received one dose of vaccine in the absence of a previous infection. The Oxford group reported that a single dose of vaccination conferred poor neutralising antibodies against the delta variant. This was also the case in the French study for both Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines at ten weeks after vaccination.

Both peer-reviewed studies showed that booster vaccinations had the desired effect of increasing neutralisation against the delta variant, albeit at lower efficacy compared with the alpha variant.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR IMMUNE PROTECTION

These studies show that our vaccines are still effective against these variants. Further data from PHE and from a Canadian study that awaits peer review show substantial vaccine-induced antibody activity against the delta variant.

In real-life terms, there is a significant reduction in hospitalisations and deaths due to COVID in the UK this summer, compared with similar rising cases last autumn.

The advanced UK vaccination rollout is sparing us the severe effect of the fast-spreading delta variant, so far. But will we be spared thousands of new long-COVID sufferers in the aftermath of the rising infections? Scientists don’t yet know the effect of vaccines on preventing long COVID, but it is known that mild infection can lead to long COVID.

Vaccine coverage in the UK and worldwide is not enough to achieve herd immunity, which is important to protect those who can’t be vaccinated. Under the circumstances, we need to curb transmission to prevent further variant mutations from incapacitating the vaccines.

Continuing surveillance of our antibodies’ effectiveness against new variants is critical to determine when we need further booster vaccinations and when we need to update our vaccines. As schools are closing and many of us are getting ready for our summer holidays, it is important to continue to take sensible precautions and ensure that our vaccines remain effective for longer.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Viral Immunology, University of Birmingham]

Alt goes mainstream: how surfing, skateboarding, BMX and sport climbing became Olympic events

HOLLY THORPE & BELINDA WHEATON
theconversation.com

The Tokyo Olympics will be novel in more ways than one. Aside from the challenges of mounting the games during a pandemic, there will also be a range of new sports competing for fans’ attention.

As well as baseball/softball (being reintroduced after a 12-year hiatus), karate, and basketball 3x3, four youth-focused action sports will debut: surfing, skateboarding, sport climbing and BMX freestyle.

According to the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the inclusion of these new events is “the most comprehensive evolution of the Olympic program in modern history”.

For many fans, however, the addition of action sports raises big questions: are they really Olympic sports, and do they deserve to take the place of more established events?

COMPETITION FOR YOUNGER FANS

Our research shows the process and politics behind this decision go back over 20 years, part of the IOC’s big goal of making the Olympics more attractive to younger spectators.

While the Summer Olympics are considered the most-watched sporting spectacle in the world, the numbers of young viewers have been declining for decades. The median age of the US TV audience for the 2016 Rio Games was 53.

Aware of this, the IOC has tried to attract younger audiences by incorporating newer action sports in both the summer (windsurfing, mountain biking, BMX racing) and winter (ski cross, big air) Olympic programs.

Since its controversial inclusion in the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics, snowboarding has become the darling of the winter games. With X Games-inspired presentation and youth cultural icons such as Shaun White and Torah Bright, snowboarding was credited with a 48% increase

in 18- to 24-year-old viewers at the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Since then, a new generation of young, cool snowboarders such as Chloe Kim have continued to inspire and attract global audiences.

That success is driving the inclusion of more action sports at the Summer Games. But the IOC has also pursued other key initiatives, such as the Youth Olympic Games and an Olympics YouTube channel.

Since 2010, the Youth Olympics have been an important testing ground for new sports, social media innovation and concepts like the Sports Lab in Nanjing in 2014, and the Urban Park in Buenos Aires in 2018. Not everything makes it past the trial stage, but much does.

AGENDA 2020 AND THE NEW VISION

The arrival of IOC President Thomas Bach in 2013 and introduction of the Agenda 2020 policy accelerated the modernising process.

In 2015, the IOC worked with the Tokyo Organising Committee to shortlist five new sports – karate, baseball/softball, surfing, skateboarding, and sport climbing – for possible inclusion in the 2020 games. When all five were confirmed for Tokyo, Bach proclaimed:

“We want to take sport to the youth [...] With the many options that young people have, we cannot expect any more that they will come automatically to us — we have to go to them.”

Following a review to measure the overall performance of all sports, various international federations developed strategies to become more youth-friendly. The International Cycling Union approved BMX freestyle, and the International Basketball Federation added basketball 3x3 for Tokyo.

This pressure to attract younger fans has had a knock-on effect, with other sporting bodies wanting to bring new events into the fold. The current battle over the possible

Olympic inclusion of freerunning (also known as parkour) is a case in point.

NOSTALGIA AND PROGRESS

With the action sport economy plateauing, many in the industry have actively supported Olympic inclusion. But the countercultural heritage of many of these sports has led to tensions.

Many participants view them nostalgically as alternative lifestyles rather than conventional sports. The associated value systems they celebrate – self-expression, creativity, fun – are often considered at odds with the disciplinary, hierarchical, nationalistic Olympic ethos.

This saw the initial proposals to include surfing, skateboarding and sport climbing in Tokyo hotly contested by many within the wider action sporting cultures, worried about the loss of autonomy and control of “their” sports.

While the Olympic athletes are enthusiastic ambassadors for their sports (and likely to see significant economic and cultural rewards), there are those within the action sport worlds who view Olympic inclusion as just another money-making stunt — part of a longer process of “selling out” with little benefit for their sports.

Our research shows it has been mostly older male “core” participants who’ve been most opposed to the inclusion of action sports.

However, an international survey showed younger participants and women were much more enthusiastic. Those under 19 were most supportive, with 80% agreeing with the statement: “I think this is a great idea and I would likely watch more of the Olympics”.

A SHOWCASE FOR FEMALE ATHLETES

The new-look games have also had their logistical challenges. Action sports organising bodies have had to navigate complex new terrain, including determining how athletes

will qualify, competition formats, equipment, uniforms, drug testing and venue suitability — all complicated by the pandemic.

But, the inclusion of the new sports (with equal male and female representation) has also helped the Tokyo Olympics come the closest ever to the IOC’s gender equality targets, with female athletes making up 49% of all Olympians.

For women in action sports, the Olympics are creating more opportunities for athletes and leaders in activities long dominated by men.

The phenomenal talents of female athletes showcased in Tokyo – including 13-year-old skateboarder Sky Brown (Great Britain), surfer Carissa Moore (US) and climber Akiyo Noguchi (Japan) – may well see the gender dynamics shifting in these sports post-Olympics.

A CHANGING OLYMPIC LANDSCAPE

Without spectators, alas, Tokyo won’t be the urban festival envisioned pre-COVID, with live music, art and a youth-friendly vibe at the urban and beach locations.

Nevertheless, the action sports central to that concept aren’t going away. Paris in 2024 will see the addition of kiteboarding and breaking/break-dancing, part of a trend that will continue at the Los Angeles games in 2028.

Traditional ideas about which events are (or aren’t) legitimate sports will also shift over coming years as the IOC stakes its claim in an increasingly competitive sports and leisure market.

With the survival of the games so dependent on viewers and sponsorship dollars, the IOC will only fight harder to stay relevant to the next generations of Olympic fans.

[Holly Thorpe is Professor in Sociology of Sport and Physical Culture, University of Waikato; Belinda Wheaton is Professor, University of Waikato]

Arunachal govt disburses loans to 789 SHGs

ITANAGAR, JUL 22 (PTI): The Arunachal Pradesh government has disbursed more than Rs 8 crore as loans to 789 Self Help Groups (SHGs) of the state under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY NRLM).

Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Wednesday virtually disbursed the amount of Rs 8, 27,47,000 under the scheme which was provided by three banks - State Bank of India (SBI), Arunachal Pradesh Rural Bank (APRB) and the Arunachal Pradesh State Cooperative Apex Bank (APSCAB).

The scheme is being implemented by the Arunachal State Rural Livelihood Mission (Ar-SRLM) of the state Rural Development department facilitating a subsidized loan amount of Rs 1 lakh to each eligible SHG, officials informed.

The event is a part of the nationwide Azadi Ka Amrut Mahotsav in line with the Aatma Nirbhar Bharat mission to commemorate 75th anniversary of Indian Independence in 2022.

ArSRLM is currently implementing DAY NRLM in 22 districts and has brought 33,516 rural households under it. The dedicated mission management units at the state, district clusters and block levels provide continued handholding support to SHGs for strengthening their institutions, financial inclusion, promotion of livelihoods and expanding existing basket of livelihoods of SHG members, the officials said.

Commending Ar-SRLM, especially its block-level coordinators, Khandu said that savings, thrift and micro finance support to the SHGs under DAY NRLM have been instrumental in initiating a transformational change at the household level in rural areas.

We are striving hard to address the formidable challenge of financial inclusion in rural areas where our citizens are not having desired level of access to financial services. ArSRLM is taking forward the state government's vision of deepening financial inclusion by providing access to affordable and appropriate financial services which would contribute towards improving GDP and lowering income inequality, Khandu said.

Asserting that it is the vision of the state government to transform rural economy of the state, Khandu said that a proper roadmap has to be evolved to take the process further.

He said the government would soon have a brainstorming with the concerned minister, coordinators and partner banks to take financial inclusion further into rural areas besides increasing the loan amount. It is a matter of pride that we today have about 3,796 SHGs, mostly of women, across the state. Our aim should be to handhold each of them through all means at our disposal.

Shortage of health workers a challenge as Nepal braces for Covid-19 third wave

PRITHVI MAN SHRESTHA KATHMANDU, 22 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]: The second coronavirus wave exposed Nepal's fragile health system.

As the cases started to soar beginning April, hospitals started turning away patients while acute shortages of beds, oxygen and ventilators, besides other essential medical goods, were reported from across the country.

After creating a devastating health crisis, the second wave abated, but only after claiming the lives of around 6,000 people in two months or so. After the coronavirus overwhelmed Nepal, various countries came forward to provide assistance, supplying different kinds of medical goods like ventilators, intensive care beds and oxygen concentrators, among others.

Amid a dismal vaccination coverage—only 4 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated so far—and a possible third wave hitting the country, concerns have now grown over the lack of health workers.

According to officials at the Health Ministry, inadequacy of human resources has emerged as one of the biggest challenges as the country braces for a potential third Covid-19 wave.

"We need an additional 20,000 personnel, including doctors and nurses, to make our health system more resilient against a health crisis like the one during the second wave," said Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesperson for the Health Ministry. "Specialist doctors and medical officers are in a greater need."



As of mid-July 2020, Nepal had 90,946 health personnel, including doctors, specialist doctors and health workers. But the number decreased to 90,369 by mid-March of 2021, according to the Economic Survey 2020-21.

Infrastructure remains a challenge but it could be built on a temporary basis in times of crisis, officials say. However, they say it's simply impossible to fill the gap between the need and demand of health workers.

"We need an additional 15,000 hospital beds and logistical management has been taking place smoothly," said Adhikari. "But we are facing difficulties managing the required staff strength."

Considering the time it takes to recruit permanent staff, the federal, provincial, and local governments have been recruiting health workers on a contract basis.

"During our recent survey about our strengths and weaknesses during the second wave of the pandemic, we found massive staff shortages at several health institutions. They may not be able to handle the potential third wave," said Dr Krishna Prasad Paudel, spokesperson for the Health Ministry. "The provincial governments are not getting specialist doctors required for critical care even though they are making utmost effort to recruit them by paying competitive salaries."

The Lumbini provincial government is a case in point. It can hire health workers for the approved 583 posts for four hospitals on a contract basis and it has also allocated the necessary budget for the purpose. Of the total posts, 463 have been filled so far.

"Despite our effort, we are facing difficulty hiring doctors, particularly specialist

doctors," said Dr Bikas Devkota, secretary at the Health and Population Ministry of Lumbini Province. "Doctors are not showing interest to join the workforce at these hospitals. I don't know why."

According to officials at the Health Ministry, even though medical officers have reached Primary Health Centres at the local level, there are not enough specialist doctors.

There are also concerns about a lack of paediatricians, as many believe the third wave could affect children. Children aged 14 and below are not being vaccinated in Nepal, and doctors have warned that they could be vulnerable to the new coronavirus variants.

The government in the first week of June asked hospitals to set aside 20 percent of well-equipped beds for children. But the hospitals need doctors as well to attend to children.

District Hospital, Mugu

is an example. It does not have a single paediatrician even though the hospital has arranged for doctors in adequate numbers.

"We have 12 doctors, including two specialists, and 10 medical officers at the hospital," Dr Dabal Malla, medical officer at the hospital, told the Post over the phone. "But we don't have a single paediatrician and there is no neonatal Intensive Care Unit."

According to him, there is also a shortage of nursing staff at the hospital.

Besides human resources, the hospital also lacks Intensive Care Unit beds and ventilators, according to Dr Malla.

Nepal received 4,126 oxygen concentrators of different capacities, 6,945 oxygen cylinders, 1.48 million oxygen kits, 13,820 body bags and 218 ventilators, among other things, from different foreign governments and domestic

and international agencies between April 14 and July 4, according to the Department of Health Services.

But the country lacks human resources with technical expertise to operate some of these equipment.

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

"Equipment can be purchased or they may be received under donations, but what will we do with such equipment when we do not prepare the manpower needed to operate these equipment?" Hem Raj Paneru, general secretary of the society, had told the Post in May.

"In some hospitals, the problem is not a lack of equipment but a lack of people with expertise to operate them."

When the second wave of Covid-19 was ravaging the country, Tikapur Hospital in Kailali was struggling to provide care for patients because it did not have the manpower to operate ventilators.

At that time, the hospital had to send patients in need of ventilator support elsewhere.

As far as human resources for children are concerned, Health Ministry officials say they are working out on some models.

Dr Paudel, the spokesperson for the ministry, concedes that apart from medical professionals, the country faces a crunch of human resources to operate some crucial machines and equipment.

All NLFB militants to surrender today: Assam CM

GUWAHATI, JUL 22 (PTI):

In a major development that can bring peace in Assam's Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), all militants of the newly formed insurgent group National Liberation Front of Bodoland (NLFB) will surrender on Thursday, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The decision was reached at the highest political level of the state, and around 20 militants, including the outfit's chief M Batha, will lay down their arms at Lalpani in Udalguri district.

The group was floated after some disgruntled cadres of the erstwhile militant outfit National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) returned to the forest. NLFB is active mostly in the BTR.

The surrendered NLFB militants will be received by Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) chief Pramod Boro at Lalpani and they will be brought to Guwahati later in the day after completing all formalities at Majbat in Udalguri.

"People's trust in the Govt policies is reflected by NLFB's decision to return to the mainstream today. I welcome their homecoming," Sarma tweeted. He said that the Assam government is committed to the all-round development of BTR and will protect the unique socio-cultural and political identity of the Bodo people.

Sharing a video foot-



age of the militants walking through a narrow jungle path, Sarma tweeted, "Further peace dawns in BTR with the homecoming of NFLB top cadres to mainstream. A great leap forward towards a peaceful Assam. Sharing live visuals of the event."

Director General of Police Bhaskar Jyoti Mahanta told PTI that the entire outfit is going to surrender.

Since its formation a few months ago, one member was killed in a police encounter and 27 others have been arrested, an Assam Police source said.

"This peace deal is an initiative at the political level, mainly by the chief minister. We have got information that M Batha will also surrender," he added.

Batha, a former NDFB militant, was among the 1,615 insurgents from all the factions of the NDFB who had laid down their

arms on January 30 last year after the signing of the third Bodo Peace Accord.

However, he was not satisfied with the implementation of the accord, and later went underground after the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) polls in December 2020.

He then announced the formation of the NLFB, which has mostly been involved in extortion in the BTR.

Meanwhile, BTC chief Pramod Boro said that the BTR will be free from all insurgent activities after the surrender of the NLFB militants.

"After the third Bodo Peace Accord, our region had become insurgency-free. But due to some misunderstanding, Batha and a few others returned to the jungle," he told PTI while on the way to receive the militants.

This is a joint effort between the Assam government and the BTC ad-

ministration that resulted in this move towards peace, Boro said.

Asked how many cadres will lay down their arms, the BTC chief said, "We have got information that NLFB has around 20 cadres and all of them will surrender. I will take them to Guwahati to keep them in the safe custody of Assam Police."

The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), United Bodo People's Organisation (UBPO) and all the factions of the NDFB had signed the third Bodo Peace Accord with the Centre and Assam government on January 27 last year, ending years of violence.

The accord provided political and economic bonanza to the Bodoland region sans a separate state or Union territory.

A total of 3,439 militants of different groups have surrendered in Assam since 2016, Sarma had said in the state Assembly on July 12.

Andaman & Nicobar reports 3 new COVID-19 cases

PORT BLAIR, JUL 22 (PTI):

Three more persons tested positive for COVID-19 in Andaman and Nicobar Islands, pushing the total caseload in the union territory to 7,521, a health department official said on Thursday.

The three persons were detected with COVID-19 at the airport during testing, he said.

All passengers arriving by flight have to undergo mandatory RT-PCR test before they are allowed entry into the

islands, the official said.

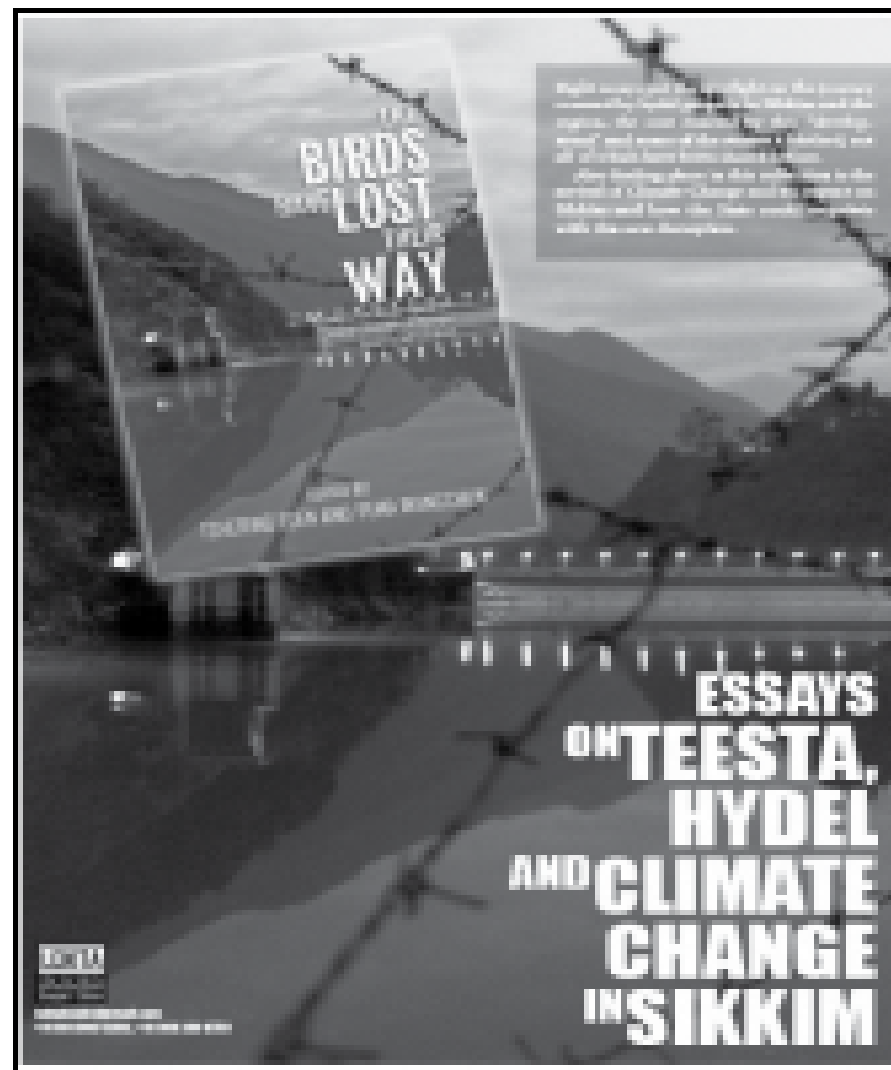
The COVID-19 death toll remained at 129 as no new fatality due to the infection was reported in the last 24 hours, the official said.

The archipelago now has 18 active COVID-19 cases of which 16 are in the South Andaman district and two in the North and Middle Andaman district. The Nicobar district is now COVID-19 free as it has no active case, he said. Four more persons recuperated

from COVID-19 during the period, taking the total number of recoveries to 7,374, he said.

The Andaman and Nicobar administration has so far tested 4,29,739 samples for COVID-19, and the positivity rate stands at 1.75 per cent, the health department official said.

More than 2.62 lakh people have been inoculated so far, he said, adding that the total population of the union territory is around 4 lakh.



US women’s soccer regroups after stunning loss to Sweden

TOKYO (AP): While it certainly wasn’t the Olympic start the U.S. women’s soccer team had anticipated, a rare loss didn’t skewer the squad’s hopes for gold.

The United States fell to Sweden 3-0 Wednesday night in the team’s opener in Tokyo, snapping a 44-match unbeaten streak. It was a surprising result for the favorites in the field.

In fact, it may have lit a fire.

Defender Tierna Davidson said Thursday that veteran Kelley O’Hara was rallying the squad ahead of Saturday’s match against New Zealand.

“She was like: ‘We don’t have a choice. We have to come out the next game and we have to be absolutely ruthless,’” Davidson said. “So I think that’s what everyone has on their mind right now.”

There’s still a good chance that the world’s top ranked team makes it to the knockout round and even a medal match. At the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the United States fell 2-0 to Norway in the first match, then went on to win gold — a fact U.S. forward Christen Press pointed to after the game.

“We’ve had a long string of wins and I think we haven’t had a lot of games where we had to come back,” Press said.

Kessie gives Ivory Coast a 2-1 victory over Saudi Arabia

YOKOHAMA, JAPAN (AP): Franck Kessie scored the go-ahead goal in the 66th minute and Ivory Coast beat Saudi Arabia 2-1 Thursday in its opening match in the men’s Olympic soccer tournament.

Ivory Coast was making its first Olympic appearance since the 2008 Beijing Games, when the team advanced to the knockout stage. Saudi Arabia hasn’t been to an Olympics in soccer since 1996.

Ivory Coast went ahead 1-0 late in the first



“I think it was actually really good to have this match. In 2008 we lost our first match and team won gold. So I think now we’re seeing this as a learning opportunity. And the message is already ‘Heads up, put it behind us, next game.’ There’s no time in a tournament like this to dwell.”

It was the first loss for the United States since January 2019, when the team fell to France 3-1 in Le Havre. The U.S. went on to win the World Cup that summer.

The Americans are vying for their fifth overall gold medal, more than any other nation,

in a sport that joined the Olympics only in 1996. They’re aiming to be the first women’s team to win an Olympic title following a World Cup.

The United States failed to medal at the Rio de Janeiro Games after it was ousted in the quarterfinals by — yep — Sweden. And the Swedes drew 1-1 with the Americans in April, the team’s only non-victory this year.

“I think we just got a little bit in our head,” Megan Rapinoe admitted. “We’ll obviously watch film and all that, but you drop points in the beginning of a tournament and now you’re

in sort of a do-or-die mode. So you’ve got to pick up points, otherwise we’re going home quick, and you don’t want to do that.”

The United States moves on to Saitama, where they’ll play the Ferns on Saturday as the group stage continues. Sweden will play Australia in the group. The Matildas downed New Zealand 2-1 on Wednesday in their opening match in Group G.

With the win, Sweden made a strong case as potential medalists in Tokyo. The fifth-ranked Swedes won silver in 2016, falling to champion Germany in the fi-

Dhawan moves up two places to 16th, Kohli remains second in ICC ODI rankings

DUBAI, JUL 21 (PTI): India opener ShikharDhawan jumped two places to 16th after his unbeaten half-century in the first match against Sri Lanka while Virat-Kohli remained at second spot in the latest ICC ODI rankings issued on Wednesday.

Dhawan’s unbeaten 86 in the first game of the ongoing three-ODI series in Colombo helped him accumulate 712 rating points and gain two slots, while Kohli has 848 points.

Another senior India batsman Rohit Sharma is at third position with 817 points in the list headed by Pakistan’s Babar Azam (873).

The rankings took into account the three-match series between Zimbabwe and Bangladesh, the third Ireland versus South Africa match and the first two ODIs between Sri Lanka and India.

Among the bowlers, India’s YuzvendraChahal (up four places to 20th),



Sri Lanka’s Wanindu-Hasaranga (up 22 places to 36th), South Africa’s TabraizShamsi (up eight places to 39th), Ireland’s Simi Singh (up six places to 51st) and Zimbabwe’s Blessing Muzarabani (up 23 places to 70th) were among the others to make headway.

In the ICC T20 rankings, Pakistan opener Mohammad Rizwan and England middle-order batsman Liam Livingstone made huge progress after finishing as the leading run scorers for their teams in the three-match series won 2-1 by England. Wicketkeeper-batsman

nal match. “I think now expectations will hit and you don’t know how it will affect each individual, but I think we are prepared for whatever emotion comes our way,” veteran goalkeeper HedvigLindahl said.

There are three groups of four teams playing at the Olympics. The top two from each group and the two top third-place finishers advance to the knockout stage.

Britain sits atop Group E after its 2-0 victory over Chile. The Netherlands leads Group F on goal differential after a 10-3 victory over Zambia, the lowest-ranked team in the competition.

Chess World Cup: Praggnanandhaa set for Vachier-Lagrave challenge in Round 4

SOCHI (RUSSIA), JUL 22 (PTI): Three Indian Grandmasters remain in contention for the honours in the men’s section of the FIDE chess World Cup with focus on teen prodigy R Praggnanandhaa in the fourth-round matches on Thursday.

The experienced P Harikrishna and fast-rising ViditSantoshGujrathi are also in the fray and will be aiming to keep their winning run going.

Play in the tournament resumes on Thursday after a day’s rest on Wednesday.

The Chennai-based Praggnanandhaa, playing in his maiden World Cup, faces highly-rated Frenchman Maxime-Vachier-Lagrave, ranked 16th in the world, in

round four.

Vachier-Lagrave comes into the match on Thursday after a hard-fought win over Russian David Paravyan via the tie-break.

The 15-year old Praggnanandhaa’s good run has drawn the attention of chess pundits and the manner in which he kept his cool in round three after veteran Michal Karsenkow forced a tie-break won appreciation.

The Indian teenager, however, faces a tough task against the French player, who came into the tournament after winning the title in the Croatia Grand Chess Tour event recently. There is a wide gulf in the ELO rating (Vachier-Lagrave’s 2760 as against 2608 of

Praggnanandhaa) apart from the experience factor.

However, the Indian will fancy his chances in a world cup knockout game as the tournament has already witnessed a few upsets including that of the world No. 2 FabianoCaruana, Anish-Giri and ShakriyarMamedyarov, among others.

Harikrishna takes on Iran’s M Amin Tabatabaei in the fourth round and starts favourite on the asis of the ratings.

Gujrathi (ELO 2726), who overcame the stubborn challenge of compatriot B Adhiban in the tie-break, will be up against highly-rated American Jeffery Xiong (ELO 2709) in what promises to be a battle among equals.

Nepal must be watchful of the geopolitical fallout of US Afghan pullout, analysts say

ANIL GIRI

KATHMANDU, 22 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]:

The United States’ announcement to withdraw all its troops by September 11, after two decades of military presence, could trigger a geopolitical flux in the region, and observers say some impact on Nepal cannot be ruled out.

Major powers and key stakeholders like the United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Iran, among others, are weighing likely scenarios in the country, as fears of the Taliban taking over loom large. Reports suggest the Taliban of late have rapidly expanded their territorial control closing in on Kabul, the capital.

Foreign policy experts and observers say pulling out the American troops from Afghanistan and a possible takeover by the Taliban would hamper regional peace and security.

Arjun Kant Mainali, a former joint secretary at the Foreign Ministry, said Afghanistan is headed towards a power vacuum, which will have a huge impact in the region, thereby Nepal seeing some ripple effects.

None of Afghanistan’s neighbours will benefit from a Taliban takeover, and with New Delhi having its diplomatic stakes—along with massive investments—the United States, according to Mainali, could encourage India, with which Nepal shares an 1,800-km-long open border, to engage with Afghanistan.

A possible triumph of the Taliban would threaten Indian investments worth billions in various sectors, including dams, roads and other infrastructure. How South Asia’s biggest country engages with Afghanistan and its outcomes are likely to have a profound impact on the region. Pakistan, Afghanistan’s next door neighbour, too is weighing its options, and Islamabad too is likely to make its moves to put New Delhi in check with the backing of China, which has its own rivalry with India and an interest in Afghanistan.

Beijing, through its Belt and Road Initiative, aims to enhance its economic and diplomatic influence. The Chinese investment so far has failed to pick up pace largely due to the constant instability and American presence in Afghanistan. But these two key aspects are going to change in less than two months from now. A senior Foreign Ministry official told the Post that the ministry has been closely following the developments in Afghanistan and possible repercussions in Nepal in the aftermath of the US pullout.

An immediate impact would be loss of jobs for Nepali nationals working in Afghanistan. The number of Nepalis working in Afghanistan is estimated to be around 100. Their safety would be a primary concern and most probably they would return home in the event of a Taliban takeover.

The Foreign Ministry official said what is more concerning is a threat to regional peace and security, which could result in displacement of Afghans. “Already, we are hosting some refugees from Afghanistan and the number could rise because our immigration and vetting systems are poor and weak,” said the official. According to the UN

refugee agency in Kathmandu, Nepal is currently hosting around 50 Afghan refugees in Kathmandu. They come under the category of “urban refugees”.

If the peace talks falter or fail altogether, it could hamper relations between Washington and Islamabad. Instability or Taliban gains in Afghanistan could embolden militants in Pakistan, thereby threatening regional peace.

“What is happening in Afghanistan and how situations will unfold, especially after the US pullout, will have a larger impact on the ties between India and Pakistan as well as India and China. A possible spillover effect in Nepal cannot be ignored,” said Ramesh Nath Pandey, a former foreign minister.

“As SAARC chair, Nepal needs to constantly raise its voice—and make it heard—at the regional level about the threats to regional peace and security from instability in Afghanistan.”

But the only platform where Nepal has some wherewithal to exert influence is in a moribund state, largely because of India-Pakistan rivalry.

Afghanistan joined SAARC in 2007 as its eighth member. SAARC itself is struggling to take its process forward and hold its 19th summit ever since India pulled out in 2016, charging Pakistan with attacking its military base in Uri in Jammu and Kashmir.

As the SAARC chair, Nepal can make a broader call for maintaining regional peace, but the bloc’s charter won’t allow any specific discussion on any specific country’s matters or issues concerning two or more countries.

Arjun Bahadur Thapa, former secretary general of SAARC, however, ruled out any possibility of discussing Afghanistan and the unfolding situation at the regional bloc’s platform.

“There is no record of member states discussing internal matters of any country,” Thapa told the Post. “Even if Nepal, as the SAARC chair, takes any initiative, a response is far-fetched.”

Experts and observers say even though there are concerns about regional peace and security coming under threat after the US pullout from Afghanistan, much depends on how individual countries engage each other and the regime in Kabul.

According to Pandey, both India and China, Nepal’s immediate neighbours, have high stakes in Afghanistan, and Kathmandu needs to monitor closely how they engage Kabul and its forthcoming government. Thapa, the former secretary general of SAARC, said countries like India, China and Pakistan that have high stakes in Afghanistan are working bilaterally or individually.

“But one thing is sure, if there is any instability in Afghanistan, it will definitely hamper regional peace and security,” he said. “For China, further instability could affect its own investment plans. With Americans set to pull out, Beijing is likely to step up its engagement in Kabul. So will India. A geopolitical flux is just on the cards.”

With Washington more likely to outsource its Afghan policy to Delhi after the pullout, some analysts say there are chances the Biden administration could start seeing Central Asia, including Nepal, through India’s prism.

Mexico opens Olympics with 4-1 victory over France in soccer



TOKYO (AP): Alexis Vega scored the first of four second-half goals for Mexico in a 4-1 victory over France on Thursday in the men’s Olympic soccer tournament.

Mexico, which won gold at the 2012 Olympics, had the better chances in the first half but the game was scoreless at the break. Vega scored first in the 47th minute and Sebastian Cordova added a second in the 55th.

Andre-Pierre Gignac, who plays for Mexican club Tigres, scored from the penalty spot in the 70th minute to narrow the gap for France, which

won the Olympic title in 1984. But UrielAtuna put Mexico ahead 3-1 in the 80th and Eduardo Aguirre added a goal in stoppage time for El Tri.

While the Olympics is for under-23 squads, coaches are able to name three players born after 1997. So teams in Tokyo are dotted with stars, including Florian Thauvin, who won the 2018 World Cup with France and also plays for Tigres.

Mexico’s team featured goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa, a 36-year-old veteran of four World Cups, and Club America teammate Henry Martin at forward.

SAPPORO, JAPAN (AP):Starting with six players who rushed from the European Championship to the Olympics, Spain was held to a 0-0 draw by Egypt on Thursday in the team’s opening match of the men’s soccer tournament.

Spain’s best chance to score at the Sapporo Dome came when DaniCeballos hit the post.

The 24-year-old Real Madrid midfielder, who got injured at the end of the first half and had to be taken out, is one of three overage players permitted in the squad.

The players in the starting lineup who were also part of Spain’s run to the Euro 2020 semi-finals two weeks ago were goalkeeper Unai-Simón, defenders Eric

China’s Zhengzhou begins cleanup after deadly storms



BEIJING (AP): Residents of the storm-ravaged central Chinese city of Zhengzhou on Thursday were shoveling mud from their homes and hauling away wrecked cars and piles of destroyed belongings following floods that killed at least 33 people in the city and surrounding areas.

Rains continued to pound parts of Henan province of which Zhengzhou is the capital city.

Streets have been turned into rivers and people were stranded in apartments, offices, hotels and rural homes in dozens of cities and towns.

In the worst incident in Zhengzhou, 12 people died Tuesday night in the subway system when it was inundated with flood waters.

Another eight people remain missing in the floods, the official Xinhua News Agency reported.

The storm front is now shifting to northeastern Henan, affecting cities including Hebi, Anyang and Xinxiang, according to state broadcaster CCTV.

Xinxiang saw its heaviest rainfall in recorded history, with more than 25 centimeters (9.8 inches) in the 19 hours

between Wednesday night and Thursday afternoon, according to the city’s weather agency. The local government has urged people not to leave home unless it’s necessary.

Residents took to social media to seek assistance as lakes and rivers overflowed and water and electricity were cut. Outside help was not arriving and residents were relying on themselves, those postings said.

Public transport in Anyang has been suspended and people were asked to work from home on Thursday, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Zhengzhou, a city of 12

million people, saw dryer conditions on Thursday, although large parts of the city remained underwater. Along with flooding subway stations and stranding trains, the rains collapsed roads and disrupted rail and air transport.

Water, electricity and gas supplies were also cut and more than 40 temporary sites were set up in the city to provide clean water.

Zhengzhou is a major hub for China’s railway network and some trains were stuck on the tracks for as long as 40 hours, prompting rescuers to send passengers food and wa-

ter. Some were able to return to their point of departure, while other passengers had to be rescued at the point where they had been stranded, according to local newspaper Henan Daily.

More than 3million people in Henan have been affected by the flooding, and direct economic losses are estimated to be 1.2 billion yuan (189 million US dollars), CCTV said on its news app. Tens of thousands have been moved to emergency shelters.

The rains in Henan will start to weaken on Thursday night, according to the China Meteorological Administration. Just as the rainstorms are winding down, Typhoon In-Fa is approaching Taiwan and the coastal provinces in southeastern mainland China.

Taiwan’s Central Weather Bureau issued a warning and said heavy rain or extremely heavy rain will affect Taipei City and other northern parts of the island through Thursday night.

The storm is then expected to move on to the Chinese mainland, battering the financial hub of Shanghai and nearby provinces of Zhejiang, Fujian and Jiangsu with rainstorms and gales, the China Meteorological Administration said.

Spanish judge questions Twitter hack suspect wanted by US

MADRID (AP): A British man charged in the United States in connection with a Twitter hack last year that compromised dozens of influential accounts is set to appear before a Spanish judge Thursday.

Joseph O’Connor, 22, is set to be questioned via videoconference from Estepona, the southern Spanish resort town where police arrested him on Wednesday on a U.S. arrest warrant, a Spanish National Court spokesman said.

U.S. prosecutors accuse O’Connor of involvement in a July 2020 hack of more than 130 accounts, including those of prominent politicians, celebrities and technology moguls.

A criminal complaint filed in federal court in the Northern District of California also charges O’Connor for hacks taking over Twitter, TikTok and Snapchat accounts, as well as cyberstalking a juvenile.

The Madrid-based National Court handles extradition requests in Spain. A court spokesman, who was not authorized to be named in media reports, said that the judge will decide whether O’Connor should remain in custody while awaiting extradition procedures.

Those procedures can take months before being resolved and involve both a judicial review and the Spanish Cabinet’s approval.

The FBI informed Spanish authorities about O’Connor’s alleged involvement in last summer’s hack, the National Police said in a press release. It said Spanish and U.S. agents took part in his arrest and search of the suspect’s residence, confiscating two computers and a mobile phone.

The U.S. criminal complaint charged O’Connor — who went by the online handle PlugWalkJoe — with crimes including cyberstalking, making extortive and threatening communications and intentionally accessing a computer without authorization.

O’Connor has denied wrongdoing in previous interviews. His lawyer couldn’t immediately be reached.

During the high-profile security breach a year ago, fake tweets were sent from the accounts of Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg and a number of tech billionaires including Amazon’s then-CEO Jeff Bezos, Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates and Tesla CEO Elon Musk.

The bogus tweets asked followers of high-profile accounts to send Bitcoin payments. O’Connor is at least the fourth suspect charged in connection with the hack.

Spain’s National Police said Thursday that O’Connor was permanently residing in Marbella, another southern coastal city popular with foreign residents and that he had been on their radar at least since April 2020 as part of an alleged criminal group committing fraud online.

Hong Kong police arrest 5 trade union members for sedition

HONG KONG (AP): Hong Kong police on Thursday arrested five trade union members over children’s books they described as seditious, and a court denied bail for four editors and journalists held on charges of endangering national security, as part of a widening crackdown on dissent in the city.

The five who were arrested are members of the General Association of Hong Kong Speech Therapists, according to local media reports.

The association published three children’s books that Li Kwai-wah, a senior superintendent of the national security department, said have seditious intent.

The books feature stories that revolve around a village of sheep that has to deal with wolves from a different village. The sheep take action like going on strike or escaping by boat, according to the synopses published on the association’s website.

Li said that the stories referenced the 12 Hong Kong activists who were arrested at sea while trying to flee the city, after most of them were charged in connection with massive anti-government protests in 2019. There was also a story about wolves who are “cruel and try to occupy the area” where the sheep live, and try to kill them, Li said.

“Of course, when we prosecute the case, we are not the one to prove that these materials have actually caused the inciting to others,” said Li.

“And the children, maybe because of the information inside ... can turn their mind and develop a moral stan-

dard against the society.”

The 2019 rallies calling for more civil rights and universal suffrage shook Hong Kong for months, often descending into violence between police and protesters. Beijing responded last year with a sweeping national security law that critics say restricts freedoms promised to the former British colony that are not found on mainland China.

The publishing of such books “brings hatred against the government and administration of justice, and (incites) violence to others,” Li said. He added that the books targeted children between the ages of 4 and 7.

Police said that also froze 160,000 Hong Kong dollars (\$20,600) in assets linked to the union.

On Thursday, a Hong Kong court denied bail to four top editors and journalists from the now-defunct Apple Daily pro-democracy newspaper. They were arrested Wednesday on charges of conspiracy to collude with foreign powers to endanger national security.

So far, eight former employees have been arrested. Apply Daily ceased operations in June after \$2.3 million in assets were frozen and police raided the newspaper’s offices, confiscating hard drives and laptops.

The national security law criminalizes secessionism, subversion, terrorism and foreign collusion in the city’s affairs. Since it was implemented, more than 100 pro-democracy supporters have been arrested and many others have fled abroad.

Olympic opening ceremony director fired for Holocaust joke

TOKYO (AP): The Tokyo Olympic organizing committee fired the director of the opening ceremony on Thursday because of a Holocaust joke he made during a comedy show in 1998.

Organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto said a day ahead of the opening ceremony that director Kentaro Kobayashi has been dismissed. He was accused of using a joke about the Holocaust in his comedy act, including the phrase “Let’s play Holocaust.”

“We found out that Mr. Kobayashi, in his own performance, has used a phrase ridiculing a historical tragedy,” Hashimoto said. “We deeply apologize for causing such a development the day before the opening ceremony and for causing troubles and concerns to many involved parties as well as the people in Tokyo and the rest of the country.”

Tokyo has been plagued with scandals since being awarded the Games in 2013. French investigators are looking into alleged bribes paid to International Olympic Committee members to influence the vote for Tokyo. The fallout forced the resignation two years ago of Tsunekazu Takeda, who headed the Japanese Olympic Committee and was an IOC member.

The opening ceremony of the pandemic-delayed Games is scheduled for Friday. The ceremony will be held without spectators as a measure to prevent the spread of coronavirus infections, although some officials, guests and media will attend.

“We are going to have the opening ceremony



tomorrow and, yes, I am sure there are a lot of people who are not feeling easy about the opening of the Games,” Hashimoto said. “But we are going to open the Games tomorrow under this difficult situation.”

Earlier this week, composer Keigo Oyama-da, whose music was to be used at the ceremony, was forced to resign because of past bullying of his classmates, which he boasted about in magazine interviews. The segment of his music will not be used.

Soon after a video clip and script of Kobayashi’s performance were revealed, criticism flooded social media.

“Any person, no matter how creative, does not have the right to mock the victims of the Nazi genocide,” said Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean and global social action director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Los Angeles-based human rights group.

He also noted that the Nazis gassed Germans with disabilities.

“Any association of this person to the Tokyo Olympics would insult the memory of 6 million Jews and make a cruel mockery of the Paralympics,” he said.

Kobayashi is a former

member of a popular comedy duo Rahmens and known overseas for comedy series including “The Japanese Tradition.”

Japan is pushing ahead with the Olympics against the advice of most of its medical experts. This is partially due to pressure from the IOC, which is estimated to face losses of \$3 billion to \$4 billion in television rights income if the Games were not held.

The official cost of the Olympics is \$15.4 billion, but government audits suggest it’s much more. All but \$6.7 billion is public money.

“We have been preparing for the last year to send a positive message,” Hashimoto said. “Toward the very end now there are so many incidents that give a negative image toward Tokyo 2020.”

Toshiro Muto, the CEO of the Tokyo organizing committee, also acknowledged the reputational damage.

“Maybe these negative incidents will impact the positive message we wanted to deliver to the world,” he said.

The last-minute scandals come as Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga’s government faces criticism for prioritizing the Olympics despite public health concerns

amid a resurgence of coronavirus infections.

Koichi Nakano, who teach politics at Sophia University, wrote on Twitter that the opening ceremony chaos underscores a lack of awareness in Japan about diversity.

Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said she learned of Kobayashi’s comments from Hashimoto.

“I was astonished,” she said.

Kobayashi’s Holocaust joke and Oyama-da’s resignation were the latest to plague the Games. Yoshiro Mori resigned as organizing committee president over sexist remarks. Hiroshi Sasaki also stepped down as creative director for the opening and closing ceremonies after suggesting a Japanese actress should dress as a pig.

Also this week, the chiropractor for the American women’s wrestling team apologized after comparing Olympic COVID-19 protocols to Nazi Germany in a social media post. Rosie Gallegos-Main, the team’s chiropractor since 2009, will be allowed to finish her planned stay at USA Wrestling’s pre-Olympic camp in Nakatsugawa, Japan.

CORONAVIRUS

PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS

DON'T LOWER THE GUARD

LOCKDOWN HAS BEEN LIFTED. BUT UNFORTUNATELY, THE THREAT OF COVID-19 HAS NOT YET SUBSIDED.

As we adopt to the new normal, here is a reminder of the precautions you must take-

WEAR A MASK

Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside

GET A FLU VACCINATION

Get your flu shot to develop an immune response before flu season begins, particularly if you have comorbidities

WASH YOUR HANDS

Wash your hands often, for about 20 seconds each with soap & carry a sanitizer

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

Stay at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from other people

GET TESTED

Get tested if you have symptoms of COVID-19. Stay at home until you get the result.

COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING

Before stepping outside, make sure to carry a handkerchief or a packet of tissues.

FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT

Carry your sanitizer, water bottle and, most importantly, avoid crowded areas.

CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE

Monitor your temperature on regular basis



BACK AT IT! Model Larsa Pippen filmed the upcoming fourth season of *The Real Housewives of Miami* in a zebra bikini.

Kanye West to reveal 'Donda' album at massive Atlanta event

LOS ANGELES (AP): Kanye West knows how to make a splash even with a listening event. West is expected to unveil his 10th studio album, "Donda" during a listening event Thursday night at the Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta. His album was named after his mother, Donda West, who died at the age of 58 following plastic surgery complications in 2007.

The sold-out event will be livestreamed on Apple Music.

West, 44, is mostly known as being associated with Chicago, but he was born in Atlanta - a Georgia city where there are no restrictions against large gatherings. The rapper-producer gifted 5,000 tickets to faculty, staff and students from some Atlanta HBCUs including Clark Atlanta, Morehouse, Spelman, Morris Brown and the Interdenominational Theological Center.

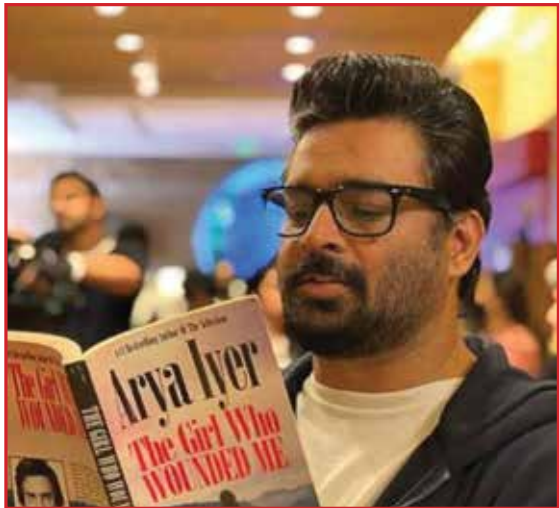
The 22-time Grammy winner revealed in a commercial, featuring U.S. track star Sha'Carri Richardson, during the NBA Finals on Tuesday that his highly-anticipated album will be released Friday. The commercial, scored and directed by West, featured "No Child Left Behind," a song from his forthcoming album.

West's new project is a follow up to his 2019 gospel-themed album "Jesus is King," which won a Grammy for best contemporary Christian album.

Last year, West announced on Twitter - with colorful cover art and a track list - that he would release his latest album. At the time, his tweets indicated that his project would release on the same day as his rival Taylor Swift's project "Folklore," but his album end-

ed up being postponed.

The two music stars have been in an ongoing beef since West famously interrupted Swift's speech during the 2009 MTV Video Music Awards when she won for best female



video. It appeared both put their differences aside after she introduced him when he won the video vanguard award at the 2015 VMAs, but a leaked video clip between both about his controversial song "Famous" caused more drama.

It's not the first time Kanye has hosted a listening event for an upcoming album. In 2016, he debuted his album "The Life of Pablo" during a massive event and fashion show at Madison Square Garden in New York City. Several big names who attended the show included soon-to-be ex-wife Kim Kardashian West, 50 Cent, Lil Kim, Caitlyn Jenner, A\$AP Rocky and 2 Chainz.

A list of Olympians to follow on social media

TOKYO (AP): With the Olympics starting Friday, athletes from around the world are in Tokyo, most of them restricted to training and their hotels because of virus protocols. Still, they are posting photos and videos of their travel and preparations for the Games.

A list of 50 Olympic athletes, sorted by sport, to follow on social media, with links to their Instagram accounts.

3-ON-3 BASKETBALL

Rae Lin D'Alie, Italy: Wisconsin native and former University of Wisconsin player who plays pro basketball in Italy.

ARCHERY

Brady Ellison, United States: Three-time Olympic medalist nicknamed "The Arizona Cowboy." Ana Paula Vázquez, Mexico: Young archer who began her career using the compound bow, but who has since switched to the recurve bow.

Mete Gazoz, Turkey: Named the 2018 Male Recurve Athlete of the Year and Breakthrough Athlete of the Year by World Archery.

ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS

Simone Biles, United States: Gymnastics superstar and gold medalist. Rebeca Andrade, Brazil: Gymnast whose career since the 2016 Olympics has been defined by a streak of injuries.

BADMINTON

Viktor Axelsen, Denmark: Bronze medalist at the 2016 Olympics.

BASEBALL

Masahiro Tanaka, Japan: Former New York Yankees pitcher who returned to Japan in early 2021. Julio Rodríguez, Dominican Republic: Plays in the Seattle Mariners minor league system.

BASKETBALL

Luka Dončić, Slovenia: Dallas Mavericks All-Star guard. Rui Hachimura, Japan: Washington Wizards forward who played collegiately at Gonzaga.

BOXING

Bakhodir Jalolov, Uzbekistan: Carried the country's flag at the 2016 Olympics.

EQUESTRIAN

Jessica Springsteen, United States: Daughter of rock star Bruce Springsteen and Patti Scialfa.

FENCING

C.A. Bhavani Devi, India: Became India's first Olympic fencer in sabre.

GOLF

Collin Morikawa, United States: Won the British Open last week. He is an American of Chinese and Japanese descent. Xander Schauffele, United States: Finished in third at the Masters in April.

HANDBALL

Yahia Omar, Egypt: His father also

played on the Egyptian national team.

JUDO

Shohei Ono, Japan: Gold medalist at the 2016 Olympics.

Naohisa Takato, Japan: Ranked first in the extra-lightweight division. Noël van't End, Netherlands: Won a gold medal at

world championships. Johannes Vetter, Germany: Won gold medal in the javelin at the 2017 world championships. Mutaz Essa Barshim, Qatar: High jumper named the 2017 IAAF Male Athlete of the Year. Katerina Stefanidi, Greece: Pole vaulter who won Olympic gold medal in



the world championships in 2019.

SHOOTING

Seonaid McIntosh, Britain: Continued her family's tradition of competing in shooting, despite suffering from arthritis.

SOCCER

Megan Rapinoe, United States: Sports Illustrated's Sportsperson of the Year in 2019.

Takefusa Kubo, Japan: Midfielder for Real Madrid.

SOFTBALL

Monica Abbott, United States: Named MVP of the Japan Women's Softball League five times.

SURFING

Stephanie Gilmore, Australia: Seven-time World Surfing League World Tour champion.

SWIMMING

Federica Pellegrini, Italy: Holds the 200-meter freestyle world record.

Katie Ledecky, United States: Five-time Olympic gold medalist.

TRACK AND FIELD

Sydney McLaughlin, United States: Holds the women's 400-meter hurdled world record. Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Jamaica: Two-time Olympic gold medalist. Jakob Ingebrigtsen, Norway: Pacemaker for Eliud Kipchoge's sub-2 hour marathon.

Dina Asher-Smith, Britain: Won a gold medal in the women's 200 meters at the 2019 world championships. Noah Lyles, United States: Won gold medal in the 200 meters at the 2019

2016. Pascal Martinot-Lagarde, France: Three-time medalist in the 60-meter hurdles at the World Indoors.

Malaika Mihambo, Germany: German-Tanzanian long jumper and sprinter. Ryan Crouser, United States: Shot put gold medalist at the 2016 Games.

Akani Simbine, South Africa: Won a gold medal in the 100 meters at the Commonwealth Games in 2018. Kendra Harrison, United States: Broke the world record for the women's 100-meter hurdles in 2016.

Femke Bol, Netherlands: Competes in the 400 meters and the 400-meter hurdles. Anita Włodarczyk, Poland: Two-time Olympic gold medalist in the hammer throw.

Ajeé Wilson, United States: Pennsylvania native who specializes in the 800 meters. Léa Sprunger, Switzerland: Competes in the 200 meters and the 400-meter hurdles. Anthony Zambrano, Colombia: Won a silver medal in the 400 meters at the 2019 world championships.

Thomas Barr, Ireland: Finished fourth in the the 400-meter hurdles at the 2016 Olympics. Yomif Kejelcha, Ethiopia: Holds the indoor world record for the mile. Lukas Weißhaidinger, Austria: Won a bronze medal in the discus at the 2019 world championships.

WRESTLING

Abdulrashid Sadulaev, Russian Olympic Committee: Won an Olympic gold medal at the 2016 Games. Risako Kawai, Japan: Won an Olympic gold medal at the 2016 Games.

R Madhavan finishes filming for 'Decoupled'

MUMBAI, JUL 22 (PTI): Actor R Madhavan on Wednesday said he has wrapped up the shoot of his upcoming web show *Decoupled*.

The Netflix original, also starring Surveen Chawla of *Sacred Games* fame, is a comedy about a couple on the verge of a divorce.

The 51-year-old actor an-

nounced the completion of the shoot on Twitter.

Aaaaannnd it's a Wrap!!! #Decoupled season 1.. , Madhavan, who made his digital debut with Amazon Prime Video series *Breathe*, wrote alongside a picture of him from the set.

"Decoupled" will see Madhavan play the role of

Arya Iyer, a writer, whose marriage is over, but he has persuaded his estranged wife (played by Chawla) to continue living with him to create the myth of family for their tween daughter, who is terrified of their divorce.

The series is directed by Hardik Mehta, known

for films like *Kaamyaaab* and *Roohi*. It is produced by Bombay Fables, Andolan Films and created by Manu Joseph.

Madhavan also has the biographical drama feature *Rocketry: The Nambi Effect*, which also marks his directorial debut, in the pipeline.

Aries:

You're feeling one with the cosmic currents, Aries, and it's helping you channel ideas from the mysterious realms. Don't be afraid to blend what's coming through with what you have been working on so far. Finding the perfect amalgamation between the two will prove to be the secret to your success, beautiful.

Tip: You're being called to blend two seemingly contracting ideas or concepts.

Taurus:

What are your favourite self-care rituals? The practices that help you feel aligned on a mind, body, and soul level? Could the answer to your question be an acupuncture session or a guided meditation that helps you tap into the power of your subconscious? It's time to honour the sacred temple and the deity who lives within, Taurus. While you're at it, free yourself from the belief that your worthiness is directly proportional to your productivity.

Tip: It's time to honour the sacred temple and the deity who lives within.

Gemini:

You've planted your seeds with loving intention, Gemini. It's now time to move to the next level. It's now time to take inspired action and focus on

growth. What you need to keep in mind as you progress on your path is that there is no right and wrong way. You have the permission to follow the urges of your soul. You have the permission to make up your own rules. Remember, letting go of the idea of who you should be is what will help you find your true freedom.

Tip: Honey, you make the rules!

Cancer:

Looks like you've got a secret admirer, Cancer. An admirer who has eyes for you and "only" you. What the cards want you to remember: the signs don't lie, beautiful. Children of the moon who are already in love will find that this is a magical time. A time of deepening their connection. A time of rising, rather than falling in love.

Tip: They've got eyes for you and only you, Cancer.

Leo:

Here's the thing, honey: we don't always get closure in the way that we want to. So holding onto the idea of how things should be, or should've been, isn't going to do you any good. What you want to do instead is breathe into the wounds. Make a conscious effort to forgive, forget, and let go. PS: The full moon this weekend will pro-

vide you with the perfect opportunity to practice 'release' rituals.

Tip: Forgive, forget, and let go.

Virgo:

You're in the mood to channel the divine feminine and bring a little more grace and beauty into the world, Virgo. Consider what you are creating as a sacred offering to the mysterious forces. Your prayer to the Universe, if you may. Remember to let go of the idea of perfection as you surrender to the flow. 'Effortless effort' is the secret to bringing forth your best work.

Tip: Perfection is overrated, beautiful.

Libra:

You're feeling one with the creative forces and the creative forces are dancing the dance of life through you. Yes, this is a beautiful time in the Libra HQ. A time of making magic and surrendering to the flow. What the cards want you to remember is that it's a good idea to trust your instincts on this one. The two seemingly contradicting ideas you have will work together like a charm.

Tip: Trust your instinct on this one.

Scorpio:

It's all about the wild and the unknown in the Scorpio HQ. You're thriving on the adrenaline rush that

comes from venturing into the uncharted territories. The old you would have walked with trepidation in the absence of a game plan. The new you knows that life doesn't come with a manual, and that's okay. Let direct experience teach you all that you need to know.

Tip: It's time to venture into uncharted territories.

Sagittarius:

Daily affirmation, Sagittarius: "I bring the gift of truth and authenticity into all of my relationships." Let go of the masks, beautiful. Break down the walls that stand between you and those you love. Remember, nobody will be able to reach out to you unless you make yourself vulnerable. The cards are also bringing your attention to the theme of self-betrayal. How and where do you need to be honest with yourself? We think you already know the answer to this one.

Tip: "I bring the gift of truth and authenticity into all of my relationships."

Capricorn:

What you're celebrating today is a landmark moment, one that is sure to get you recognised for all the right reasons. But the journey doesn't end here, Capricorn, and you know this more than any-

body else. So, don't get carried away by the appreciation. You have miles to go before you sleep, beautiful.

Tip: There are miles to go before you sleep.

Aquarius:

It's easy to complain about your external reality, Aquarius. But complaining about it won't transform anything. What you want to do instead is turn your gaze inwards and become the change you want to see. Remember, you are not powerless here. You are a magician and a lightworker, one who is meant to play an active role in the Earth's ascension process.

Tip: Be the change you want to see.

Pisces:

The trouble is, you're seeking love, approval or validation from others, Pisces, a pattern that isn't serving you in any way. What you want to do instead is become the love that you desire. To treat yourself with kindness and gentleness, and to nurture yourself in a manner that makes you feel seen. Remember, it is our inner alignment that ultimately determines the experiences that we will attract in the world outside.

Tip: Treat yourself with love, kindness, and gentleness.