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# SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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## After a week, a day with no Covid deaths in Sikkim

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

The number of active cases of novel coronavirus in Sikkim dropped below 2,500 after a long while today and now stands at 2,448 with 273 more formerly Covid-positive patients completing their home isolation in the last 24 hours.

What is even more reassuring is that after a full week, Sikkim again saw no Covid deaths in the State. The last time this had happened dur-

ing the second wave was on 14 June.

Sikkim's count of recovered cases has now reached 16,329 against the 19,321 confirmed cases recorded thus far.

Although the Sunday break for the VRD Labs had a role to play in the low number of new cases detected in the past 24 hours, Sikkim can still draw comfort from the fact that today's 25 new cases are the lowest since 26 April when 23

cases had been reported.

The new cases were detected from the testing of 172 samples for COVID-19 on Sunday giving Sikkim a daily positivity rate of 14.5%.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, nine new cases were found in RT-PCR testing of 46 samples and 16 more persons tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 116 samples.

Out of these 25 new cases, 17 were registered in East District, two in West District, four in South District and two in North District.

The hospitals saw only five new admissions. Of the 2,448 active cases in the State, only 107 have symptoms severe enough to require hospitalisation while the rest are recuperating at home. Of the patients in hospital, 15 are admitted in ICU at STNM hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

## CM joins Int'l Yoga Day at Samman Bhawan



**GANGTOK, 21 JUN (IPR):** Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang joined his Cabinet colleagues and senior officials of the State Government in a yoga session this morning at Samman Bhawan to mark the International Day of Yoga 2021. The session was organized by Sikkim State AYUSH Society, Health Department.

This year, the theme for the event is "Yoga for Well Being" in line

with the global concern around the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizing the importance of maintaining good health within the constraints of social distancing.

The Yoga session was led by Dr. S. Vinudha B.N.Y.S, MD (Yoga), and demonstrated by Yoga instructor, Jagannath Niraula and Ms Manita. Different yoga asanas were demonstrated that are useful to boost the im-

mune system.

This day is celebrated every year to raise global awareness about the benefits of the ancient Indian practice that helps to keep mind, body and soul in peace further helping individuals to maintain a balanced lifestyle in these changing times.

The message of Yoga is to promote both physical and mental well being of humanity.

## Singtam PS team seizes drugs, again

**SUMMIT REPORT  
SINGTAM, 21 JUN:**

After the recent drug bust in Lingzey, the Singtam PS team, East District again seized contraband substances from the possession of one Ganesh Pradhan, a resident of Jubilee Line Singtam, on Sunday.

Police is reported to have caught the accused red-handed in the middle of a deal near the IDBI Bank ATM at Singtam at 7.45pm on 20 June.

1,440 capsules of Spasmo-Proxylon were recovered from the accused.

A juvenile was also reportedly accompanying Mr Pradhan.

Rs 1,17,960 in cash was recovered from the house as well.

A case under NDPS Act and SADA has been registered at Singtam PS.

## Sikkim begins registration of labourers

**GANGTOK, 21JUN (IPR):**

The Labour Department has started the process of registration of individual labourers and worker as well as those working in organized and unorganised sectors in the State.

The registration process commenced today at CS Rai Government Secondary School, Arithang, here in the capital.

After the passing of Sikkim Labour (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Bill, 2021 by the Sikkim Legislative Assembly during the recent Budget Session, the Labour Department has expedited the process to start registration throughout the State.

It may be reminded that a Task Force has been constituted in each Municipality Ward and each Panchayat Ward under the Sikkim Labour Protection Act, 2005 for the purpose of detailed data collection of unorganised/individual workers and their registration

## Minister chairs coordination meeting of Animal Husbandry Dept

**GANGTOK, 21 JUN (IPR):** The Minister for Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Lok Nath Sharma chaired a coordination meeting with the departmental officials of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services, Directorate of Fisheries and Sikkim Milk Union at his official chamber at Tashiling Secretariat, today.

The meeting was attended by Secretary, AH&VS, Dr. Sangey D. Bhutia, Manazing Director Sikkim Milk Union Dr. A.B Karki, Director(AH) Dr. B.M Chettri, Director (Feed & Fodder) Dr. Ghanashyam Sharma, Additional Director of Fisheries, CS Rai, Additional Directors, Scheme Incharge, Joint Directors and Officials, AH&VS Department.

The meeting had thorough discussion on the need for conducting preliminary exercise for the implementation and rolling out of financial incentives of Rupees Five



Thousand, announced by the Chief Minister to benefit and encourage farmers in the piggery sector.

The Minister advised to form Three Tier Committees at Central, District and Gram Panchayat Unit Level at the earliest for taking up onward action, comprehensively. He advised to conduct Field Survey for Registration of pigs/piglets, Insurance Coverage and to prepare

appropriate mechanism in ensuring smooth mode of implementation to achieve visionary objectives envisioned by the Chief Minister.

He came out with an advice to submit a proposal before the Rural Development Department, Govt. of Sikkim, for the construction of Piggery Shed of identified households.

Minister Mr Sharma

also directed to immediately install the Digital X-Ray Machine at State Veterinary Poly Clinic at Deorali. He assured to resolve the issues related to the requirement of adequate strength of Power supply in coordination with the concerned department, at the earliest.

Mr Sharma enquired on the work progress pertaining to taking over

turn to pg02

## Black Flag greeting for Bengal Governor in Darj

**SMRITA KHAWAS  
DARJEELING, 21 JUN:**

West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankar drove up to Darjeeling today to sights of TMC and GJMM [Binoy Faction] supporters lining the roads waving black flags at him.

The Governor, in his interaction with media persons at Darjeeling, returned to his criticism of the Mamata Banerjee Government and protocol issues in how the administrative and police senior officials stayed away from him in the district.

He made special mention of the post-poll violence in Bengal and remarked that he was surprised that the DM, SP



and DSP did not present themselves on his arrival here.

Darjeeling's Lok Sabha MP, Raju Bista, of BJP also remarked that today was a "Black Day" for Darjeeling for the manner in which the Governor was received here.

"I just want to tell them that they are disrespecting the entire Gorkha community and

Darjeeling with their deeds. The black flags were waved not only at the Governor but also on Constitution of India since the Governor is the constitutional head of the State," he said.

He added that the district administration could have easily stopped the protestors and that it was unfortunate that they did not.

## The role of ASHA and AWW in fighting COVID in Sikkim

**NAMCHI, 21 JUN (IPR):** It is said that the worst challenges brings out the best in an individual or an organization and this saying goes very well with the frontline workers of Sikkim, particularly the work being executed by the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) and Anganwadi Workers (AWW). Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in the year 2020 these workers along with the rest of the globe is fighting the pandemic relentlessly. The health workers have learnt to adapt and to cater to the needs required to combat this disease while also performing their regular duty which revolves around immunization and treatment of different kinds of illness.

The South District has approximately about 153 number of ASHA workers spread across the rural areas and one of them is 50 years old Dhaka Doma Bhutia from Temi Tea Garden who is currently busy with Corona related work.

Since last year, she and her team has been creating awareness about this disease and the basic hygiene that one need to practice which is washing hands at regular intervals or use hand sanitizers, wear a face mask and maintaining social distancing. However, she says that the importance of handwashing is always being reiterated to the public as the ASHA Workers have been taught being a part of Vil-

lage Health, Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC) and she says handwashing is also an important tool to fight certain sickness like diarrhoea.

Dhaka Doma has been an ASHA Worker since the year 2007 and till date she has been a part of three covid mass sampling collection drive in her area and has traced numerous primary contacts of covid positive patients. She highlighted that managing covid related work also comes with risk and said that there has been instances wherein members of her team was covid positive in the event of discharging their work. In these two years of tackling corona Dhaka Doma emphasized that proper counseling and support towards the covid positive patient is extremely important as covid is a curable disease and that one and all needs to battle this disease together.

In Lower Mamring, 38 years old Nirmala Pradhan is a part of the South District's 332 army of Anganwadi Workers. She has been trained to provide education, nutrition and standard health services in rural areas but as of now Nirmala is active in Covid related work consisting on contact tracing and monitoring of covid cases.

She has also personally ensured covid samples collection and at present she is helping in administering vaccination to people belong-

ing in the priority group of 18-44 years at Bingmong Primary Health Centre. However, she highlighted an instance in which one beneficiary who was supposed to be vaccinated declined due to hesitancy and misinformation but Nirmala underlines the importance of getting vaccinated and assures that the said beneficiary will be guided with reliable information and vaccination will be given.

The resilient contribution that these ASHA and AWW workers have provided during these testing times is unparalleled, their network and years of healthcare practice in villages has helped in community engagement. They have been instrumental in addressing Covid misconceptions, effective implementing of quarantine and most importantly they have also actively disseminated information on how to discard covid related bio medical waste. These health care workers are aggressively monitoring covid symptoms, and have been giving out the State Government's

turn to pg02





# SKM condemns Chamling's statement on Namchi incident

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha party has strongly criticized and condemned the press statement of former Chief Minister, Pawan Chamling published today in different print media regarding the recent incident in Namchi where Bhaichung Bhutia's effigy was burnt by a group of women. SKM has asked the former CM to check the ground reality on the

incident before making any statement.

An SKM press release mentions that Bhaichung Bhutia accused the SKM government of pocketing commissions and percentage after the stone-laying ceremony of 300-bed hospital in Namchi. Investigation on the matter has already been initiated by the government and administration, it adds.

Mr Chamling's allegation that the incident was

pre-planned by SKM is not only humorous but also reveals that he is trying to politicize the incident by using Bhaichung Bhutia, SKM has alleged.

At the same time, the party has said that whoever burned the effigy of Bhaichung Bhutia did not burn the effigy of a person honoured with Padmashree and Arjuna Award but of a politician who has given priority to a playground instead of health in this pandemic

period.

SKM government has always respected Bhaichung Bhutia for his contributions and achievements in the field of sports but it was saddening to see him trying to obstruct the positive work of the government with his negative comments even after SKM government had arranged an alternative ground at Boomtar, the release adds.

It was the former CM

who had stalled the work on Bhaichung Stadium at Namchi for nine years just because he was angry with Mr Bhutia, the party has alleged further adding that it was the SKM government which restarted the work on the stadium.

Mr Chamling should understand the difference between two years and 25 years before commenting on the SKM government, the release adds.

## Culture Dept observes Int'l Yoga Day

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

The North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC), Ministry of Culture, Government of India, Dimapur, Nagaland, in collaboration with the Culture Department, Government of Sikkim, successfully observed International Yoga Day today in virtual mode.

The celebration had the participation of officials from Culture Department and others under the guidance of Doma Yangzum [Instructor], Karma Donka and Ayushree Subba [Assistant Instructors].

The programme was conducted from 8:00 am to 9:00 am

## International Day of Yoga observed in Gangtok



**GANGTOK, 21 JUN (IPR):** The Seventh International Day of Yoga was observed in the presence of Governor, Ganga Prasad, here at Raj Bhawan, Gangtok today.

The programme was organised by Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, Gangtok, Sikkim under the Central Council for Research in Ayurvedic Sciences, Ministry of AYUSH, Govt of India, New Delhi.

The Governor was accompanied by Secretary to the Governor, Raj Yadav, AYUSH, Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, Sikkim, Director Incharge, Dr Shriprakash,

Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, Gangtok, Sikkim, Research Officer, Dr SK Sahu, Research Officer, Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, Sikkim, Dr Rahul D Ghusa, Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, Co-ordinator, Sikkim, Hemant Yadav, members and Yoga instructors from Regional Ayurveda Research Institute and officials of Raj Bhawan.

During the programme, the Yoga asanas were administered by Dr Rahul Ghusa to the participants. The programme also included felicitation by the Hon'ble Governor to select members of Re-

gional Ayurveda Research Institute, Gangtok, Sikkim.

The idea for an International Day of Yoga was first proposed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his speech at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. This initiative was backed by as many as 177 nations and the day (21 June) is being celebrated as International Day of Yoga since then.

The International Day of Yoga 2021 which was observed today had the theme "Yoga for well-being", much applicable to the current situation where the society is still recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

## SMIMS conducts webinar on International Yoga Day

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

The Department of Physiology, Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences (SMIMS), under Sikkim Manipal University (SMU) conducted a webinar on the theme "Be with Yoga, Be at Home" to mark the International Yoga Day on 21 Jun, 2021.

A press release informs that the programme was inaugurated by Vice Chancellor, SMU, (Lt Gen) Dr Rajan S Grewal (AVSM, VSM) The Vice-Chancellor, in his address, said that this year's theme "Yoga for well-being", carries much relevant for our times in a society still recovering from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The Covid-19 plight was not just a physical crisis, it also left lasting impacts on mental health, with many left in psychological suffering, depression, and anxiety dealing with the pandemic-necessitated restrictions and loss. Yoga can come to the help of people dealing with such crises, and promote both physical and mental health," he said.

Registrar SMU, Prof Dr Karma Sonam Sherpa and Officiating Dean, SMIMS, Dr Sudip Dutta also graced the inauguration ceremony. Head, Dept of Physiology, Prof (Dr) Sanjay Kumar, SMIMS delivered the welcome address.

Governor of Sikkim and Chancellor, SMU, Ganga Prasad in his address, delivered through virtual mode, stressed the importance of Yoga, especially during the present Covid-19 pandemic.

Earlier, a message from Director, Dr Raghvendra Rao, CCRYN, Ministry of

AYUSH, Government of India was aired. This was followed by a message from Honourable Health Minister, Dr Mani Kr Sharma, Dept of Health and family Welfare, Government of Sikkim, wherein he emphasised the role of Yoga in overcoming stress especially in this period of Covid-19 Pandemic and lockdown.

The WEBINAR was addressed by three eminent speakers, Prof & Head, Prof (Dr) Vivek Sharma, Department of Physiology, AIIMS, Rajkot, Associate Professor, Dr G Manjunath, Swami Vivekananda Yoga Anusandhana Samsthana, Bangalore and Associate Prof, Dr Satish Patil, SDM College of Medical Sciences & Hospital, SDM University, Dharwad, Karnataka.

The academic session was followed by Yoga demonstration session by Iyengar Yoga Practitioner, Manisha Mukundan.

An intercollege debate was conducted in which students from AIIMS Rajkot, AIIMS Bhopal, Guwahati Medical College, Regional Institute of Medical Sciences, Imphal and Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences participated.

The WEBINAR was joined by more than 1000 participants from all over the country.

It is also to be mentioned that the programme was supported by Central Council for Research in Yoga and Naturopathy (CCRYN), Ministry of AYUSH, Government of India.

Sikkim Medical Council (SMC) has also approved credit hours (SMC/3028/21) of 03 hours for speakers and 02 hours for participants.

## Bal Krishna Kasaju Sen Sec School observes Int'l Yoga Day

**SUMMIT REPORT  
NAMTHANG, 21 JUN:**

Bal Krishna Kasaju Senior Secondary School, Namthang observed International Yoga Day 2021 today. The event was carried out virtually with all the staff members and students participating from their homes.

School chief prefect, Palmu Tamang gave a brief message on the celebration of International Yoga Day and Sports captain, Mamta Tamang stressed upon the importance of Yoga for the development of mental and physical health in her video message.



All the teachers and students performed yoga asanas which was shared via WhatsApp and other social media platforms.

Principal Doma Zimba congratulated

everyone for active participation in the virtual celebration of Yoga day. All the participants will be awarded with the e-certificates, it is informed.

## NHPC Teesta-V observes International Yoga Day

**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

NHPC, Teesta-V Power Station, East Sikkim observed 7th International Yoga Day (IDY) under the theme "Be with Yoga - Be at Home" at Balutar, East Sikkim, today.

In the wake of COVID-19 restrictions and Ministry of Ayush, Government of India, guidelines, this year, International Yoga Day has been observed in non-

congregative manner, a press release informs.

Employees and their family members performed "Yogasanas" at their respective homes from 07.00am to 07:45am using online and digital resources circulated by Ministry of Ayush, Govt of India.

In his message, General Manager (I/c), Sanjay Darbari, Teesta-V Power Station & Teesta-IV HE Project said that International Day

of Yoga has been celebrated annually on 21st June since 2015 with the objective of building public interest in Yoga and to highlight its importance and contribution towards public health and emotional well-being in the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic. He appealed to all the employees to make Yoga an integral part of their life and thereby ensure a healthy life for all.

### Minister chairs...

of Cheese Plant, Dentam. He also directed the concerned officials to expedite the process of making North Milk Union, fully functional and operational.

The Minister directed the concerned officials for time bound implementation of schemes with new vigor and dedication. He urged everyone to be well aware of all activities including the delivery of quality inputs before the identified beneficiaries.

He also enquired about the current status of various schemes with the concerned incharge of various sections including Feed and Fodder, Disease Investigation Cell, Piggery, Dairy, RKVY,

### The role of ASHA...

Covid Care Kit and in case of positive children they are being referred to the Medical Officer for proper treatment.

The State Government in order to decentralize has set up a Village Level Monitoring Team comprising of Gram Panchayat/Municipal Councillor as team member, ASHA as health member, Anganwadi Worker and volunteers as members. This team has been formed

Veterinary Services, Poultry, State Livestock Development Board, Bio Medical Waste, Extension and Training, Statistics, Research and others.

Managing Director, Sikkim Milk Union, Dr. A. B. Karki also informed that the production of milk has been increasing continuously, and recently touched Fifty Four Thousand liter per day. He appraised about the ongoing disbursement of Interest Free loan of Rupees Forty Thousand to the dairy farmers, provision of interest free loan of Rupees Forty Thousand against death of a cow, Insurance Scheme of 50:50 ratio to be started in near future.

## Zilla Panchayat provides protective gear to PHCs




**SUMMIT REPORT  
GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

Simik Lingzey Zilla Panchayat Member, Sherap Kazi distributed protective gear to Dangaythang and Lingzey PHC, ASHA workers, milk collection centre and veterinary centre, today.

As per a press release, Mr Kazi provided hand-sanitizer, handwash, face shield, BP machine, Pulse-oximetre, hand sanitizer manual machine, kits, hand gloves, N95-mask, infrared thermometer & sodium hypochloride sanitizer.


**HAVE A STORY  
TO SHARE?**

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**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.**

<p><b>Symptoms of nCoV</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Fever</li> <li>● Difficulty in breathing</li> <li>● Dry Cough</li> <li>● Severe acute respiratory syndrome</li> <li>● Pneumonia - like symptoms</li> </ul>	<p><b>Precautions to Prevent nCoV</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Wash your hands often with soap.</li> <li>● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer</li> <li>● Observe good personal hygiene.</li> <li>● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.</li> <li>● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.</li> <li>● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.</li> <li>● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.</li> <li>● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Treatment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.</li> <li>● No vaccinations available as of now.</li> <li>● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected.</li> </ul>	
	
<p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104</p> <p>District surveillance Officer</p> <p>EAST : 7029372100</p> <p>WEST : 9593297809</p> <p>NORTH : 9641957468</p> <p>SOUTH : 7407691463</p> <p>New STNM</p> <p>AMS : 9434711402</p>	
<p><b>DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH &amp; FAMILY WELFARE GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM</b></p>	



# CBSE says optional Class 12 exams in Aug-Sept

**NEW DELHI, 21 JUN [NDTV]:** The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) today told the Supreme Court it will set up a panel to deal with "disputes on (the) computation of results" for Class 12 students. The top court had asked the Board on the clarifications last week and it responded today.

Online facility will be available for registration for optional exams for those not satisfied with the assessment policy.

"Examination will be conducted by the board only in the main subjects as and when conditions

are conducive for holding the examinations. However, the marks obtained by a candidate in this examination will be treated as final for those who opt to take this examination," the CBSE said in its affidavit filed in the top court.

The affidavit filed by Sanyam Bhardwaj, controller of examinations in CBSE said, "Optional exams may be held when the situation is conducive, tentatively between August 15, 2021 and September 15, 2021."

The CBSE said that the examinations for private or second chance compartment candidates

shall be conducted in a manner that they will fall within the assessment policy for the academic year 2019-2020, as approved by the top court last year. These results shall be declared in accordance with the mentioned assessment policy.

"Their examinations shall also be conducted anytime between August 15, 2021 to September 15, 2021, subject to conducive situation," the affidavit said.

Earlier today, the Supreme Court asked the CBSE and ICSE to respond by tomorrow to the concerns raised by

some students and parents on the schemes of both the boards formulated to evaluate Class 12 students, whose examination was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A special bench of Justices AM Khanwilkar and Dinesh Maheshwari said that it will hear the response of counsels for CBSE and ICSE on Tuesday on the concerns raised by interveners.

The bench also directed registry to list all pending petitions in the matter on Tuesday in which they have challenged the decision of CBSE to cancel class 12

examination and raised concerns on the evaluation schemes of both the boards.

Similarly, the Council for the Indian School Certificate Examinations (CISCE) has also filed an affidavit in the top court saying that it has complied with the direction and amended its assessment scheme for Class 12 students.

It said that the CISCE will endeavour to publish the results as expeditiously as possible, subject to the situation remaining conducive and stable, the results will be published on or before July 31, 2021.

## NICOG Church distributes relief to the needy



**SAGAR CHHETRI GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

NICOG Church, Metro Point Tadong has been reaching out with grocery kits in different parts of the State during this COVID-19 pandemic.

A team of NICOG Church led by Pastor Jigmi Lepcha distributed grocery kits consisting

of rice, dal, aata, sugar, edible oil, soyabean and salt to needy people under Gangtok and Pakyong sub-divisions today.

As per Pastor Jigmi Lepcha, the team has been working tirelessly in reaching out to people with groceries ever since the pandemic began.

He mentioned that

the church has already distributed more than 250 grocery kits so far in this second wave of COVID-19 to people under these two sub-divisions. He further added that the NICOG Church team had distributed grocery kits and other essential items to around 350 families during the first wave of COVID-19 last year.

*Dr Phurba Lepcha awarded Best Veterinarian Award by IVA*



**WANGCHUK BHUTIA MANGAN, 21 JUN:**

Deputy Director, Mother Dairy Farm, Karfector, South Sikkim, Dr Phurba Lepcha, has been awarded the Best Veterinarian Award 2021 today. The award has been conferred by Indian Veterinary Association (IVA).

The Department of Animal Husbandry Livestock, Fisheries and Veterinary congratulated him for receiving the award for his remarkable contributions in this field and making the Department and the State proud.

*Brain-dead man gives life to two persons*

Chennai, June 21 (PTI): A 27-year-old man, declared brain-dead after meeting with an accident in Salem, has given new lease of life to two individuals in Chennai, MGM Healthcare said on Monday. The patient, hailing from Salem, suffered a traumatic brain injury in the road accident and was admitted to a private hospital there.

He was declared brain-dead by doctors at that hospital. After his family agreed to donate his organs, the heart and lungs were airlifted to Chennai from Salem, said a press release from MGM Healthcare.

## Chuba youth felicitate frontline workers



**SUMMIT REPORT NAMCHI, 21 JUN:**

Tendong Youth Club [TYC], Chuba, South Sikkim, felicitated frontline workers by offering them "Khadas" and providing packed lunch in their club premises today.

They honoured the

frontline workers who were actively involved in the vaccination drive currently taking place at Government Secondary School, Chuba. The team members of TYC also distributed masks, sanitizers, juice and snacks to the locals, who came for

the vaccination.

TYC has expressed their heartfelt gratitude to SCS, Deputy Secretary, AB Gurung, Mines and Geology Department, Govt of Sikkim for sponsoring the lunch provided to the entire team of frontline warriors.

## Doctor donates LCD projector to Lingi Payong School



**SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 21 JUN:**

Dr Om Prakash Dhakal, Professor of Medicine at Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences (SMIMS), donated an LCD projector to Lingi Payong Secondary School today, a press release informs.

The projector was

received by school in-charge, S Singh on behalf of the school in the presence of local teachers and SMC members.

Earlier he had assured the school to provide the much needed asset during his visit on the sidelines of a medical camp organised in memory of his father.

Mr Dhakal is the son of Late Ram Prasad Dhakal of Lingi Payong and had studied in the school for a short period in 1976-77 before shifting to Gangtok.

The school family has thanked Mr Dhakal for his generous contribution and assured to put the asset to the best use.

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### SIKKIM STATE LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY

Development Area, Gangtok: Sikkim  
Phone: 03592-207753, Fax : 03592-207753

### "MESSAGE".

Sikkim State Legal Services Authority is organizing National Lok Adalat on Saturday the 10th July, 2021 for the following types of pre-litigation and pending cases viz:

#### Pre-Litigation

- N.I Act cases under Section 138;
- Money Recovery cases;
- Labour disputes cases;
- Electricity and Water Bills (excluding non-compoundable)
- Maintenance Cases.
- Other (Criminal Compoundable and other Civil dispute).

#### Pending in the Courts / Tribunals:

- Criminal Compoundable Offences;
- N.I. Act cases under Section 138;
- Money Recovery cases;
- MACT cases;
- Labour disputes cases;
- Electricity and Water Bills (excluding non-compoundable)
- Matrimonial disputes (except divorce);
- Land Acquisition cases;
- Service matters relating to pay and allowances and retiral benefits;
- Revenue cases (pending in District Courts and High Courts only);
- Other civil cases (such as rent, easmentary rights, injunction suits, specific performance suits) etc.

Any individual or any department having such matters either pending in Courts/Tribunals/ Departments or in pre-litigation stage may approach directly before the Sikkim SLSA, District Lok Adalats or Taluk Lok Adalats for settlement on or before 03.07.2021 at the following address:

- Sikkim State Legal Services Authority, Development Area, Gangtok, East Sikkim. E-mail: [sikkim\\_slsa@live.com](mailto:sikkim_slsa@live.com) Phone No.03592-207753.
- High Court Legal Services Committee, Development Area, Gangtok, East Sikkim. E-mail: [sikkim\\_slsa@live.com](mailto:sikkim_slsa@live.com) Phone No. 03592-207753.
- District Legal Services Authority (East) District Court's Complex, Sichey Gangtok, East Sikkim. Phone No. 03592 284462.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (East), District Court's Complex, Sichey, Gangtok, East Sikkim. Phone No. 03592 284462.
- District Legal Services Authority (North) District Court Complex, Mangan, North Sikkim. Phone No . 03592 234694.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (North), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Pentok, Mangan, North Sikkim. Phone no.03592 234694.
- District Legal Services Authority (South) District Court Complex, Namchi, South Sikkim. Phone No. .03595 264654.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (South), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, District Courts Complex, Namchi, South Sikkim. Phone no.03595 264654.
- District Legal Services Authority (West) District Court Complex, Kyongshing, West Sikkim. Phone No. 03595 250010.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (West), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Kyongshing, West Sikkim. Phone no.03595 250010.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee, Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Chungthang, Sub-Division, North Sikkim. Phone No. 03592 234502.
- Taluk Legal Services Committee (West), Court of Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Soreng, Sub-Division, West Sikkim. Phone n o: 03592-253000.

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## Daily COVID-19 count in India lowest in 88 days

**NEW DELHI, JUNE 21 (PTI):** India logged 53,256 new coronavirus infections, the lowest in 88 days, taking the total tally of COVID-19 cases to 2,99,35,221, while the active cases further reduced to 7,02,887, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Monday.

The death toll climbed to 3,88,135 with 1,422 fresh fatalities, the lowest in 65 days.

The active cases now comprise 2.35 per cent of the total infections, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate has improved to 96.36 per cent, the data updated at 8 am showed

A net decline of 26,356 cases

has been recorded in the COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

As many as 13,88,699 tests were conducted on Sunday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 39,24,07,782.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 3.83 per cent . It has been less than 5 per cent for 14 consecutive days, the ministry said, adding the weekly positivity rate has declined to 3.32 per cent.

Recoveries continue to outnumber daily new cases for the 39th consecutive day. The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to

2,88,44,199, while the case fatality rate has increased to 1.30 per cent, the data stated.

Cumulatively, 28,0036,898 COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered so far.

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



## Cut to the Chase

*Journalism is not an easy job...*

The debate over what constitutes ‘proper’ journalism has always been frenetic, growing even more so in the present times of a multitude of 24-hour news channels from diverse backgrounds addressing diverse audiences with their own spin on reportage and an expansive bouquet of Facebook news-media pages for the hyper-local audience.

Be it Opinion Polls or Exit Polls on national news channels or raising of issues and coverage of public meetings in local newspapers, grand debates have been held over which media provided more balanced reports and which have been too sensational and/or amateurish or which news report subverted journalistic ethics. These debates will never resolve because journalistic ethics are not codified enough to throw absolute answers on what is right and what objectively wrong. The sheer scale of information available is so huge that it becomes difficult to fault one when they start ‘editing’ for space or time constraints. Priorities, after all, differ from person to person and different people will receive the same news differently. Matters get complicated when journalism puts a spin on information and manipulates, in Bollywood fashion, the audience. Come on, news now comes with background music for instance, hence all debates on journalism are valid and even necessary.

It is important for the audience to evaluate the media, critique its role and even, from time to time, weigh its significance. This will keep us sharp and accountable, because admittedly, sensationalism is stealing space from significance too often in newsrooms and reportage. Take for instance the shallowness with which a talented actor’s suicide was reported at around this time last year, or the superficiality with which citizen’s protests have been covered and nationalism explained away as leader-bhakti. When they throw words like the “State is not a charity shop” or “opportunistic coalitions eroding the trust in governments and resource loot” they expose their lack of awareness.

Journalism is essentially about reportage, and only then about the greater disputes of rights and wrongs. And this not because journalism has no responsibility towards propriety and other social virtues, but because it is not advisable to have the messenger also play the role of the judge because doing so will encourage distillation of information to suit individual biases. Rights and wrongs and resolutions are challenges which require application of serious and deep thought, and a reporter, by virtue of her/his job-description is not expected to be the expert with all the solutions. That does not go to say that reporters cannot help in resolving issues. In fact, this is what a good journalist should be committed to. They do not, however, resolve conflicts by suggesting remedies. They do so by providing information since in most cases, conflict exists in the absence of information and an abundance of misinformation. Once all sides have access to complete information, they become equipped to work out solutions.

To disburse information, however, a journalist is required to procure it first and on this path are the most pitfalls. Since information has to be sourced, there is always the danger of a “plant”. People with personal vendettas are known to release selective information causing many journalists to stumble [in the long run]. While the general argument goes to say that information is information irrespective of where it came from, a journalist is expected to glean through it carefully. If at all someone needs to let off a shot, why should it be from the shoulders of a journo? Information, at the end of the day should serve the needs of the people and not individuals.

And there are still those who think journalism is easy and simple?

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## A Child Psychiatrist Who Knew Those Killed in the London Terror Attack Offers Advice on Helping Kids Deal With Trauma

JAVEED SUKHERA  
*theconversation.com*

This has been a year like no other. The ever-present nature of racial trauma in society has been challenging for all of us, especially children and teens. The COVID-19 pandemic has created a rupture in society, magnifying inequities and redefining what it means to be vulnerable. The violent nature of racism has been on full display on television and in social media.

On June 6, a man struck five members of the Afzaal family with his car in London, Ont. Four members of the family were killed while the youngest was taken to the hospital with serious injuries. The attacker has been charged with four counts of first-degree murder, one count of attempted murder and terrorism.

Children and teens have faced unprecedented challenges from the pandemic to George Floyd’s murder, anti-Asian racism, the discovery of unmarked graves at a former residential school, and now the recent attack on a Muslim family hits too close to home.

Although many parents are worried about what their kids can handle, we cannot shelter them from what is happening around us.

As a child psychiatrist and community activist, I never imagined that my work on healing racial trauma and advancing equity through education would become painfully relevant when a family that I had a personal connection with was murdered a few minutes from my home. Police reported that our beloved friends were targeted for their Muslim faith. It was a crime driven by hate.

### RACIAL TRAUMA IS UNIQUE

Trauma resulting from racism and anti-Muslim prejudice can be unique. Research from 2018 on the impact of Islamophobia on Muslim children in London, Ont., found that rising anti-Muslim prejudice and demonized narratives about Muslims in the media led to repeated traumatic exposures, re-

sulting in fears of being Muslim in the community.

Despite the pervasive nature of anti-Muslim prejudice in some communities, health-care systems struggle with meeting the needs of Muslim families. The result of our communities silence in the wake of violence driven by prejudice and hate can be re-traumatizing as well.

Sadly, we have seen this type of crime before, yet it is never easy to have a conversation about these topics with kids and teens.

For me personally, it was an entirely different experience to have to explain to my own children that other kids they once played with were targeted for being visibly different.

As we processed our own grief and trauma in diverse ways, I found myself fielding calls and questions from friends and community members about how we can move forward and heal. I drew from my experience and knowledge of evidence and trauma-informed approaches to provide practical, relevant suggestions to help parents and children cope with trauma.

### HELPING KIDS DEAL WITH TRAUMA

First, adults should work on processing their own grief and traumatic reactions without transferring their emotions on their children. We can role model our own vulnerability, however, we should not impose our reality on our kids. We can remind them they are loved, emphasize that there is a trusting adult to support them, but we must give them space to process their own emotions, however complex or ambivalent they may be.

Second, children and teens should lead us through the kind of conversation they are ready (or not ready) to have. Every family is unique. There is no one way to grieve. There is no one way to heal.

Although we can remind them of our presence, we should not force conversations or take away their agency. Doing so can have the effect of re-traumatizing them and compounding their suffering. We can remind them that we are always available if they need us. When they share how they

are feeling, validate their emotions and give them permission to feel without trying to fix anything. Healing is a process, not a checklist.

Third, do not look away. Tell your children the truth and have open conversations. Kids have access to information and can look anything up. Encourage them to ask questions, help them filter the information that the world throws at them and help hold space for them to process their emotions together.

Lastly, encourage them to push back against their fears. This is especially important for families who may have been personally affected by the London attack. Many racialized and visibly Muslim children and adults are afraid to go out of their homes or go for a walk.

Children and teens should be empowered and encouraged to be deliberate and unafraid to be themselves. The process of facing fear itself should always be gradual with kids and teens leading the way. We can encourage them to come outside with us, take walks and make appropriate visits to community sites that foster healing and inspire strength.

Within my family, each one of us is processing what happened in a unique and different way. We recently visited the site where this tragedy happened. We gave ourselves space to process our emotions, ask questions and validate ourselves and one another. We left with a sense of remembrance as we processed our pain and continued our journey towards healing. We will never forget what happened, but we will also step into the future with love, compassion and determination.

We know we cannot ignore the hatred that exists within our world, but we also know that we must remember to find and share light on the darkest days. We can be that light and love for one another. We can find hope, amplify it and share it with ourselves and the world beyond.

*[the writer is Associate professor, Psychiatry, Western University]*

## Tackling Burnout: How to Deal With Stress and Safety in the Workplace

KRISTEN DEUZEMAN  
*theconversation.com*

When I began working in disaster and emergency management, there was a funny anecdote suggesting the job was 98 per cent paperwork and two per cent adrenalin.

Looking around at my office environment, I failed to see much adrenalin. To make sense of this, I researched some major disasters and discovered that when they strike, emergency managers transition to working in emergency co-ordination centres. These nerve centres often look like something out of the movies, with people staring intently at their computers while large screens everywhere display critical information.

During the devastating Fort McMurray wildfires in 2016, which destroyed entire subdivisions and caused more than \$1 billion in damage, I finally understood the “two per cent adrenalin” aspect of our work. For months, the work was non-stop and around the clock. Soon, I noticed the initial state of exhilaration was replaced by a state of exhaustion.

At that time, I was reminded of the 2004 book, *When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress*, written by Canadian physician Gabor Maté, that outlines the four most stressful stimuli: Lack of information, uncertainty, lack of control and conflict. I observed that during a disaster, all of these factors are present in droves.

In a disaster, critical decisions must be made with incomplete or contradictory information. Lack of control and uncertainty emerge when navigating policies, guidelines

and laws. There’s often conflict with resource allocation and conflicting priorities.

Other notable factors include atypical working hours, extremes of activity and a sedentary work environment. While some features are unique to our profession, I’m under no illusion that we’re alone in our experiences. Many other professions and positions face similar challenges.

### EXHAUSTION FOLLOWS EXHILARATION

While short-term workplace stress is to be expected, the problem emerges with long-term sustained stress.

As Hungarian scientist Hans Selye described in 1950 in his seminal general adaptation syndrome about workplace stress, after sustaining a period of exhilaration, stressed employees eventually reach the exhaustion phase and can no longer sustain additional pressure. Today in my clinical psychology practice, my clients who work in various fields tell me about exhaustion, irritability, impatience, trouble concentrating and taking in new information and feeling under-appreciated at work, with some even contemplating quitting their jobs.

In 2019, the World Health Organization identified a syndrome it labelled “burnout” resulting from chronic workplace stress. Now people who report feeling depleted of energy or exhausted, mentally distanced from or cynical about their jobs and experiencing problems getting their work done can be diagnosed with a workplace injury.

Burnout as the result of work-

place stress carries significant implications for employers. Canadian occupational health and safety standards require employers to protect the physical and mental health of their workers. If people are meeting the criteria for burnout, organizations may be neglecting their legislated duty to ensure psychologically safe workplaces.

### PREVENTING, MITIGATING STRESS

The good news is something can be done. While it will require genuine organizational commitment, prevention and mitigation are key. But to get at the heart of the problem, we must first ask if employers are even tracking psychological safety in the workplace.

Of those that do, most merely encourage staff to exercise more, meditate, sleep better and eat a more balanced diet. This is, quite simply, passing the buck onto an already depleted workforce and does nothing to address the core of the problem. The answer is not to recommend Band-Aid solutions, suggesting employees try even harder in their downtime to compensate for organizational neglect.

For meaningful change, organizations must first implement clear policies reflecting their commitment to workplace mental health and psychological safety, and appoint a wellness champion and leaders who model these values.

The next step is identifying workplace hazards through employee engagement surveys, workplace risk assessments, incident investigations, exit interviews and disability claim

data if available. Identifying controls to prevent psychological harm is also necessary.

### RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE POLICIES

Once hazards have been identified, prevention and mitigation measures must follow. Organizations must define and train employees on their duties and responsibilities, monitor workload, consider flexible work arrangements, clearly communicate priorities and ensure respectful workplace policies are understood and that managers who defy them are held accountable.

Organizations must address environmental risks by encouraging movement, breaks and getting sunlight. Finally, documenting and reporting hazards as a measure for ongoing program development is necessary because it helps inform company policy as part of holistic continuous improvement efforts.

Throughout the entire cycle, I remind organizational leaders to remain present to support staff through the execution of all tasks — and of the value in fostering happy and engaged teams.

Research shows that the highest performing workplace teams have one thing in common: psychological safety. When people feel safe, they are engaged and committed to their work, and this builds organizational resilience. Employers who manage to get ahead of the burnout curve will gain a distinct advantage over other organizations.

*[the writer is Industrial/ Organizational Psychologist, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology]*



# Nepal to switch to light electric vehicles by 2031 as fossil fuel import balloons

**KRISHANA PRASAIN**  
**KATHMANDU, 21 JUN [KATHMAN-  
DUPOST]:** “For the manufacture and assembly of electric vehicles, companies of the world's top ten brands will be attracted to set up their plants,” said Finance Minister Bishnu Prasad Paudel while presenting the annual budget on May 29. Tax subsidies would be offered and land on lease would be provided to make Nepal attractive for such companies, he said.

The idea may be wonderful but whether it is feasible is an entirely different matter.

“There are simply too many challenges,” said Krishna Prasad Dulal, president of Nepal Automobile Dealers’ Association. Industry insiders say the goal is not realistic and that the government has not really done anything so far apart from making statements.

According to Ramesh Dhaneku, marketing communication manager of Morang Auto Works, authorised distributor of Yamaha two-wheelers and Skoda four-wheelers, there is very little possibility that any international EV (electric vehicles) maker would think of entering a small market like Nepal.

“Nepali automobile market is small and it requires huge investment to set up such a plant,” he told the Post. “Even if the plant is set up to export EVs, the company needs to compete with giant Indian and Chinese markets.”

“Therefore, it is a lofty idea,” Dhaneku said.

Around 15,000 units of automobiles are sold in Nepal annually. Of them, sales of electric vehicles, which are more expensive than those running on fossil fuel, stand at 1,200 units.

“The demand may increase, if the electric vehicles get assembled inside the country, to nearly 2,000 units annually at present rates,” Dhaneku said. “But such sales won’t be enough even to recover the cost of production.”

As most of the top electric vehicle brands have their assembling and manufacturing units in India, they will be manufacturing in India rather than coming to Nepal, according to him. “The cost of



production is very low in India; so why would they come to Nepal?” he said. Dulal, however, sounded more optimistic as he said Nepal should promise a bumper offer to attract top electric carmakers.

“If the government creates a conducive environment for investment, there is the possibility of attracting international EV makers,” Dulal told the Post.

At present, Golchha Group and Jagadamba Group have been assembling Bajaj and TVS motorcycles, respectively, in Nepal.

Shyakar Group and Morang Auto Works are also planning to open plants to assemble two-wheelers—Honda and Yamaha.

Besides, businesses involved in the auto trade or even EVs said that regulatory mechanisms to do business in Nepal are not supportive. “There are lots of procedural hassles,” admits Dhaneku.

According to the Doing Business Index of the World Bank group, Nepal ranks 94 among 190 countries.

Finance Minister Paudel also said that Nepal plans to shift from light vehicles that run on petroleum products to electric ones by

2031 and announced a strategic plan to lower fuel imports and the concomitant pollution.

Nepal imported petroleum products worth Rs215.76 billion in the fiscal year 2018-19, although this figure dropped to Rs163.70 billion in 2019-20 due to Covid-19-related restrictions that kept vehicles off the roads and brought factories and development projects to a halt for nearly four months from March to July last year. According to a report of the Central Bureau of Statistics released in 2019, Nepal’s gasoline consumption almost doubled in the last five years, leading to a yawning trade deficit besides having consequences to the environment. Nepalis consumed 90 percent more fuel than they did five years ago and petroleum products are the largest single imported commodity in terms of value every year.

The country’s demand for petroleum products has been increasing by 10 percent annually despite regular supply of electricity, officials of Nepal Oil Corporation, the state-owned monopoly, said. Paudel’s claim of shifting to electric vehicles aside, the govern-

ment is planning to build more pipelines to import petroleum products. Nepal plans to lengthen the petroleum pipeline from Amlekhgunj, Bara to Lothar, Chitwan, and up to the Kathmandu Valley in the near future.

A team from the Indian Oil Corporation, which built the Motihari, India-Amlekhgunj pipeline as a gift to Nepal, also conducted a survey for a potential pipeline from Siliguri, India to Nepal Oil Corporation’s depot at Charali, Jhapa.

The initial survey has shown that 35 km of the pipeline will be in the Indian territory and 15 km on the Nepal side of the border. These are long-term fuel import policies and require billions in investment.

Meanwhile, many countries, including neighbouring India and China, have announced dates to phase out vehicles that run on non-renewable resources.

The Indian government aims to make India a 100 percent electric vehicle nation by 2030. It has proposed that two-wheelers below the engine capacity of 150cc sold in the country after March 31, 2025, and three-wheelers sold

after March 31, 2023, should be run on electricity. China has announced an ambitious plan to require all new car sales in 2035 to be either hybrids or new-energy vehicles. In contrast, Nepal’s import of vehicles—most of them running on petrol and diesel—has been increasing. According to the Trade and Export Promotion Center, the country imported vehicles and spare parts worth Rs82.43 billion in the first 10 months of the current fiscal year 2020-21, up 38 percent compared to the same period last fiscal year.

The country imported vehicles and spare parts worth Rs91.16 billion in the fiscal year 2018-19.

In the current fiscal year, there is 60 percent to 120 percent of excise duty on electric vehicles.

But the budget for the fiscal year 2021-22 has abolished excise duty on import of electric vehicles and reduced customs duty from 40 to 10 percent to increase the internal consumption of electricity and to promote the use of environment-friendly means of transportation. The new provision will have a price differential of Rs1 million to Rs3 million depending

on electric motor capacity of the vehicle and this will increase the use of electric vehicles, according to automobile dealers.

In line with Paudel’s announcement, government officials say preparations for the implementation of all provisions announced by the government to facilitate the entry of electric vehicle manufacturers are underway.

According to Jiblal Bhusal, director general at the Department of Industry, in order to increase the use of electric vehicles, the government, with the participation of the private sector, will build 500 charging stations in Kathmandu and other cities across the country. Nepal Electricity Authority has already awarded the contract of setting up 50 charging stations in major cities.

Bhusal said they have started preparing for the implementation of all provisions announced by the government to facilitate the entry of EV makers.

“The government has announced tax waiver, customs waiver and subsidy, and administrative facilitation for such companies willing to enter Nepal,” Bhusal told the Post. “A working committee will be formed to formulate and implement policy to shift light-weight vehicles operated on fuel to electric vehicles by 2031.”

But environmentalists say rather than focussing on attracting international manufacturers to Nepal, consumption of electric vehicles in the country needs to be promoted first.

For one, public transport could be promoted to shift to electric buses, said Bhusan Tuladhar, an environmentalist.

“This would also decrease fuel consumption and air pollution,” he told the Post.

As for the manufacture of electric vehicles, much needs to be done, according to him.

“The government does not have any detailed road map for it,” he said. “The government should prepare a detailed long-term financing plan, institutions to promote electric vehicles and detailed plans of manufacturing.”

## Bengal to employ 32,000 teachers by next March: Mamata

**KOLKATA, JUN 21 (PTI):** The West Bengal government will be appointing over 32,000 teachers for upper primary and primary levels by March next year, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Monday.

The appointment process to fill up at least 14,000 vacancies in the upper primary level (classes 5-8) and 10,500 in the primary level (classes 1-4) will be completed before the Durga Puja in October. Around 7,500 more posts for primary teachers will be filled up by March 2022, Banerjee said. “So, around 32,000 teachers will be appointed by next March. This will definitely help our school education,” the CM said.

She said that the appointments will be made on the basis of the merit list and no lobbying will be required.

“Those who have passed the examinations are eligible for the jobs. The appointments were stuck because of court cases,” Banerjee said.

The Calcutta High Court had in February ordered an interim stay on the recruitment pro-

cess for primary teachers following petitions filed by job aspirants who alleged discrepancies after their names did not feature on the merit list issued by the West Bengal Board of Primary Education.

The high court later directed the West Bengal Central School Service Commission (WBCSSC) to ensure that deserving candidates are not left out and the recruitment process is conducted transparently.

The Calcutta High Court, which initially asked the Commission to publish the interview list by May 10, had allowed them some time in view of the ongoing COVID pandemic.

The Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) for recruitment of teachers in upper primary schools was held in August 2015 and the results were declared in September 2016. The results of the interview were out in August 2019.

Around five lakh candidates had appeared for the tests.

In December last year, Banerjee had announced that 16,500 teachers would be appointed at the primary level.

## BJP's north Bengal leader, seven others join TMC

**KOLKATA, JUN 21 (PTI):** In yet another jolt to the BJP, the party’s Alipurduar district president, Ganga Prasad Sharma, joined the TMC on Monday, as senior leader of the state’s ruling party Mukul Roy, who also switched sides two weeks ago, claimed that this was the “beginning of the saffron party’s end” in the state.

Seven other BJP leaders from the region, too, followed in Sharma’s footsteps and joined the Mamata Banerjee camp.

Roy, addressing a press meet here, said the BJP’s rise in the state began with the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, when it managed to bag several seats in north Bengal, and its downfall, too, will start from the region.

“This is just a glimpse of what lies ahead... The BJP’s fall in the state is imminent,” Roy, who was the saffron party’s national vice president until recently, underlined.

Asked what he might have to say about BJP MLA Suvendu Adhikari’s insistence that he quit as an MLA, having won the Krishnanagar Uttar assembly seat on a saffron camp ticket, Roy said, “He should first find out what his father (Si-

sir Adhikari) was up to.” Roy was referring to the TMC’s demand for disqualification of Kanthi MP Sisir Adhikari, who crossed over to the BJP, much like his son, ahead of the polls.

Sharma, on his part, alleged that the BJP has ignored the sentiments of grassroots workers while choosing candidates for the assembly polls, “inducting people at its own will and flying them to Delhi”.

“We felt neglected but still gave our best to the organisation and ensured that five saffron camp candidates from Alipurduar district get to win the assembly elections. Now, however, I intend to work for people under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee,” he stated.

Rejecting Suvendu Adhikari’s assertion that Sharma changed sides as he was denied a saffron party ticket in the assembly polls, Sharma said, “Let me ask him why he chose to join the BJP ahead of the polls? Also, I wish to know why he was made the leader of opposition in the Assembly and not Manoj Tigga, who is a senior and loyal member of the camp.”

Coming down heavily

on local MP John Barla, who has recently sought a separate union territory comprising north Bengal districts, the BJP turncoat pointed out that the parliamentarian, instead of doing something constructive for the region, is “fanning the flames of division”.

TMC chief whip in the Upper House, Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, who was also present at the press conference, said the people of the state will distance themselves from the BJP even further due its demands of “separatism”.

Echoing him, education minister and senior TMC leader Bratya Basu noted that the saffron camp, on one hand, is ob-serving ‘Poschimbongo divas’ (West Bengal Day), and on the other, its MP is seeking a bifurcation of the state, with no regard for its integrity. Talking about Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar’s visit to north Bengal, the TMC’s Rajya Sabha MP said, “He is free to go anywhere he wishes to... but he should have taken the state government in confidence.”

Dhankhar has embarked on a week-long visit to north Bengal earlier in the day amid the controversy that has erupted in the region in the wake of Barla’s demand.

## Arunachal reports 158 new COVID-19 cases

**ITANAGAR, JUN 21 (PTI)** Arunachal Pradesh reported 158 new COVID-19 cases on Monday, taking the tally to 33,081, a senior health official said. The death toll in the frontier state remained at 159 with no fresh casualties reported in the last 24 hours, State Surveillance Officer Dr Lobsang

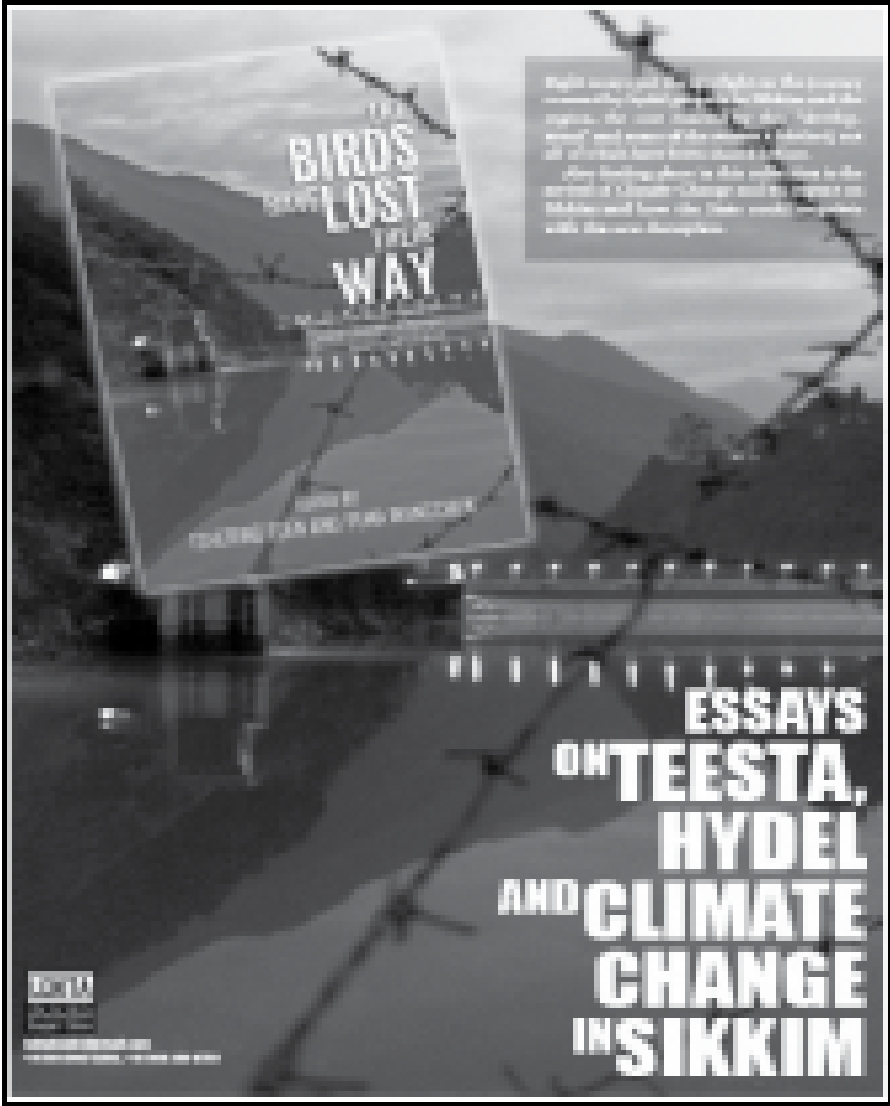
Jampa said. The Capital Complex Region reported the highest number of fresh cases at 52, followed by Kurung Kumey (14) and Changlang (11), the official said.

Of the fresh infections, 155 were detected through rapid antigen tests, two through RT-PCR and one via TrueNat

methods, the official said.

There are 2,515 active cases in the state at present, he said. Total 244 patients were cured of the disease in the last 24 hours, taking the total number of recoveries to 30,407

The new cases were detected after testing 4,036 samples on Sunday.





British FM  
heads to  
Southeast  
Asia  
looking for  
closer ties

**BANGKOK (AP):** Britain's top diplomat headed to Southeast Asia on Monday on a three-nation visit as his country looks to promote closer ties and trade with the region following the U.K.'s exit from the European Union.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab's trip to Vietnam, Cambodia and Singapore comes the week after Britain announced the broad outlines of a free trade deal with Australia, the first the country has negotiated from scratch since it left the EU.

That deal was expected to boost trade between the two nations, and the British government said it hoped it would also help it join a regional trade agreement which would open the door to increased trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

A recent British government review of defense and foreign policy recommended that the U.K. "tilt" its focus toward the Indo-Pacific region in response to China's growing influence on the world stage.

Raab has said the shift includes a greater emphasis on common strategic interests in the region, which goes beyond trade to also include issues such as maritime security and climate change.

As part of the initiative, Britain earlier this year dispatched a strike group led by the Royal Navy's flagship aircraft carrier the HMS Queen Elizabeth on a 28-week deployment to Asia that Prime Minister Boris Johnson insisted was not meant to be confrontational toward China.

"One of the things we'll be doing clearly is showing to our friends in China that we believe in the international law of the sea and, in a confident but not a confrontational way, we will be vindicating that point," Johnson said in May before the carrier group sailed from Portsmouth.

After arriving late Monday in Vietnam, Raab is to hold talks with Vietnamese officials Tuesday and speak at an event held by the 10-country Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN.

A meeting with Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen scheduled for Wednesday was canceled after Hun Sen announced he had been indirectly exposed to COVID-19 and was quarantining as a precaution.

Raab is to meet with his Cambodian counterpart, however, along with other officials in a visit that the Cambodian Foreign Ministry said it hoped would strengthen bilateral ties, as well as help "multilateral cooperation within the ASEAN framework."

Raab's trip wraps up Thursday in Singapore, where he is to meet with the prime minister and other officials, as well as business leaders.

# At 35, Felix makes a comeback and lands her 5th Olympics

**EUGENE, JUN 21 (AP):** Flat on her back, gasping for breath, Allyson Felix kept her eyes on the scoreboard.

When her name came up in the second spot in the 400 meters, she kicked up her heels and covered her face with her hands.

No doubt, this fifth trip to the Olympics is her sweetest.

The 35-year-old mom rallied from fifth at the start of the homestretch to the second-place finish at U.S. track trials.

It earned her the chance to win a 10th Olympic medal and break a tie with Jamaica's Merlene Ottey as the most decorated female track athlete in the history of the games.

"I'm just proud of making it to this moment, Felix said after Sunday's race. There's so much that's gone into this. Many times, I wasn't sure if it was possible. I'm just proud of fighting and making a way somehow."

Running from outside her usual comfort zone, in Lane 8, Felix got off to a fast start and led 100 meters in. Slowly, she lost the lead, lost her grip on the third spot and was fighting just to stay close. But in a closing burst that will likely go down as one her best, she reeled in half the field.

Felix finished in 50.02 seconds, 0.24 behind Quanera Hayes, who also has a 2-year-old, and 0.01 ahead of Wade Jones.

"I knew one thing was for



sure. I was going to go down fighting to the line, Felix said.

Sunday wasn't all great for the 30-something crowd.

In a jam-packed 100 men's final, 39-year-old Justin Gatlin pulled up lame about halfway through the race and finished last. The former Olympic and world champion is entered in the 200, as well, but this could signal the end of an era.

The new era belongs to Trayvon Bromell, Ronnie Baker and Fred Kerley, who finished in the top three spots, also leaving Noah Lyles out of the mix (but still the favorite

in the 200).

World-record holder Keni Harrison won the 100-meter women's hurdles title, though the American threesome for that race isn't quite set.

Defending Olympic champion Brianna McNeal finished second, but her trip is contingent on her winning an appeal on a doping conviction related to missed tests. She's banned for five years, but was allowed to race while waiting on the appeal. Fourth-place finisher Gabbi Cunningham could get her spot.

"I can celebrate this, Mc-

Neal said. I'm just happy I was able to have the opportunity to compete here. I just thank God for that. ... I'm just going to take it day by day.

Other winners Sunday included Garrett Scantling (decathlon), Vashti Cunningham (women's high jump), Keturah Orji (women's triple jump) and Rudy Winkler (men's hammer throw).

All will be in Tokyo five weeks from now.

The road there for Felix has been filled with more twists and turns than she might've imagined two de-

CADES ago when she burst onto the scene as America's fresh-faced sprint star.

They included the difficult birth of her now-2-year-old daughter, Camryn, who spent time in the neonatal intensive-care unit after she was born; and a very pronounced move into advocacy for female athletes in her sport, many of whom had been left on the sideline by sponsors when they became pregnant.

The COVID-19 pandemic put an even tougher spin on things, costing Felix a year at a time in her career when every

day counts. To make the most of the time, Felix found herself waiting outside her house for coach Bobby Kersee to measure out distances on the street so she could train while tracks and gyms were closed.

"My first year back was a struggle, and I just kept getting hit with thing after thing, Felix said. There was the sponsorship battle, and I was just Man, I hope something comes together for me.' I just kept fighting. I wanted to give it one more shot.

What made Sunday night even sweeter was that she got to celebrate with Hayes, who brought her 2-year-old son, Demetrius, onto the track and introduced him to one of the greatest sprinters ever.

"I was just thanking her for being who she is and never giving up, Hayes said, while playing with her kid in the post-race Zoom interview. Just paying homage to her, and honestly telling her thank you.' To go through this with her, as a mom, makes it more special.

And so, in a way, Father's Day at Hayward Field felt more like Mother's Day.

Hard to imagine anyone on the track had a problem with that.

When they watch and see me, I hope they see it's possible, Felix said when asked what her message to moms was on one of her best days ever. We're going to keep fighting.

## Argentina counting on Messi - and history - against Paraguay

**BRASILIA, JUN 21 (AP):** Argentina is looking to Lionel Messi to help it secure a spot in the Copa America knockout stages with a win against Paraguay on Monday.

Argentina tops Group A with Chile and will hope for an inspired Messi at the Man Garrincha stadium in Brasilia as the 33-year-old soccer great seeks his first Copa America trophy with Argentina.

Argentina and Chile have four points, one more than third-place

Paraguay which has a game in hand. Uruguay and Bolivia have zero points.

The top four teams in each group advance to the knockout stages.

"We will play match after match, but it is clear we have a great team and where we can go depends only on ourselves," said Argentina defender Cristian Romero.

Messi played a key role in Argentina's 1-1 draw with Chile and its 1-0 win against Uruguay. Against Paraguay, Messi

will be making his 147th appearance for Argentina, equaling the record of Javier Mascherano.

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni might not be able to count on midfielder Giovanni Lo Celso and winger Nicolas Gonzalez due to injuries with Exequiel Palacios and Angel Di Maria, respectively, as possible replacements.

Paraguay, which beat Bolivia 3-1 in its only match so far, has never beaten Argentina in 22 games in the South American championship.

## Dad was my best friend, guide, mentor: Jeev remembers Milkha Singh

**CHANDIGARH, JUN 21 (PTI):** Ace golfer and late Milkha Singh's son Jeev Milkha Singh on Monday paid tribute to the sprint legend, who died of COVID-19 complications last week, saying he would need a lifetime of resilience to deal with the loss of his best friend, guide, and mentor.

Milkha, one of independent India's biggest sporting icons, died here on Friday after battling the infection for a month.

The 49-year-old Jeev said Father's Day on Sunday was "another sad reminder of what I've lost".

"Dad was much more than my father - he was my best friend, my guide, my mentor," Jeev, who was in Dubai when Milkha tested positive for COVID-19 and reached here in a couple of days to be with him,

said in a tweet.

"I hope I've the same resilience & inner strength to overcome all odds. I really need it now. And I will need it for the rest of my life," he added.

Milkha was cremated here on Saturday evening with full state honours with Jeev lighting the pyre. Milkha also had three daughters.

Sports Minister Kiran Rijju, Punjab Governor and Chandigarh Administrator VP Singh Badnore, Punjab Finance Minister Manpreet Singh Badal and Haryana's Sports Minister Sandeep Singh were among the dignitaries who attended the last rites.

The family's tragedy was compounded by the loss of Milkha's wife and former national volleyball captain Nirmal Kaur just five days before the legendary sprinter's death. Nirmal had also

been battling COVID-19.

"Somehow, I don't remember much of Dad's funeral procession, but one sight I will never forget. A military van coming to a stop and these soldiers getting out and giving dad the salute.

"The Milkha family has always been grateful of the Indian Army, and I want to thank them again," said Jeev.

Jeev had had earlier described his mother's death as the "loss of family's backbone." The seasoned golfer thanked people for the outpouring of support.

"I lost my mom and dad. But what has been even more emotional is the thousands of messages we have been getting from people as if they have lost someone of their own," he said.

"Thank you to all dad's fans and well-wishers for supporting us at this time," he added.

## Lack of match practice hurting Indian pacers in WTC final: Simon Doull



**SOUTHAMPTON, JUN 21 (PTI):** Former Kiwi pacer Simon Doull feels lack of match practice in the run-up to the ongoing World Test Championship final against New Zealand was hurting India's pace bowling attack.

Unlike New Zealand, who played two Tests against England before the WTC final, India have been devoid of match practice ahead of the marquee clash.

The Virat Kohli-led side's last five-day match was against England in a 2-1 series win at home in March.

"...at times you look and overthink and say 'did they (India) have enough preparation?' I think they did. I am sure in the last 10-12 days they would have bowled enough deliveries to make sure they are ready and raring to go," Doull told Harsha Bhogle in a

cricbuzz show.

"But it's hard to simulate match practice. You can try in these intra-squad games but it just doesn't quite work and that's the key. It is genuinely hard to replace match practice that makes you better and get you ready for those matches."

Doull made the statement in reference to Indian pacers below-par display in New Zealand's first innings score of 101 for 2 in reply to India's 217 all out.

The pace trio of Jasprit Bumrah, Ishant Sharma and Mohammed Shami failed to extract considerable amount of swing from the favourable Ageas Bowl conditions, unlike their Kiwi counterparts.

Kyle Jamieson (5/31), Neil Wagner (2/40) and Trent Boult (2/47) used the seaming conditions

well to bundle out India for a timid total in the rain-affected match.

Doull said New Zealand were definitely benefited by the two games against England ahead of the marquee clash.

"...New Zealand went into their first Test match at Lord's against England, they had the very same preparation that India had coming into this Test match.

"New Zealand were in Southampton for around 10-11 days, played intra-squad matches, training practices and when they turned at Lord's they looked pretty set and ready to go.

"Tim Southee bowled beautifully, Devon Conway came straight out of 10 days of net session here and scored a double hundred at Lord's. They looked like they were prepared and ready to go."

Doull said barring Ishant Sharma, India lack an out-and-out swing bowler in the playing eleven.

"They are not genuine swing bowlers. I know Jasprit Bumrah can swing the ball, Ishant is more of a swing bowler, he comes round the wicket with that angle wrist takes the ball away. He does take the ball away from the left-handers and into the right-handers.

"Mohammed Shami has never really been a genuine swing bowler. He is a seam bowler and always bowls upright," the 51-year-old former fast bowler said.

"To me, it is not Bumrah, Shami it is more Ishant Sharma. I did however expect the ball might seam a little bit more. Shami and Bumrah at times found it but they were not just consistent enough," he added.



# Debate over Myanmar upends start to UN rights body session

**GENEVA (AP):** The U.N.'s top human rights body opened its latest session on Monday and was immediately embroiled in a debate over the representation of Myanmar, where a military takeover toppled the civilian government in February.

Western countries said two planned debates about the human rights situation in Myanmar during the Human Rights Council's 3-1/2 week session should go forward, even without the country represented. But China, the Philippines and Venezuela insisted it should be on hand.

The showdown delayed the opening statement to the council from the U.N. human rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, who aired concerns about human rights in places like China, Mexico, Russia, Sri Lanka and Ethiopia's Tigray region. She said she hoped to address Myanmar and other rights issues in places like Ukraine, Nicaragua and Iran later during the session.

Myanmar hasn't been represented at the U.N. in Geneva since the civilian government's ambassador left after the junta took over. The U.N. General Assembly's credentials committee is facing a decision about which representation of Myanmar will be recognized.

"If we exclude the country concerned, this is not fair," said Ambassador Chen Xu of China, urging the debates on Myanmar to be put off until the council's next session in September.

But Western envoys insisted the rights situation in



Myanmar was urgent, notably over alleged rights violations such as those suffered by the Muslim Rohingya minority and — more recently — protesters against the military takeover who have faced a deadly crackdown.

"We recognize that we are dealing with an unusual set of circumstances that have not arisen before," said Rita French, Britain's international ambassador for human rights. "(But) the reason why two dialogues were mandated just a few months ago is because there is a human rights crisis in Myanmar."

Envoys agreed to maintain the council's schedule that includes the two debates on Myanmar. But the council pres-

ident, Ambassador Nazhat Shameem Khan of Fiji, acknowledged her office would continue to assess whether they would proceed, and said the plans could still change.

Pressure has been growing against Myanmar's military. In a rare move, the U.N. General Assembly on Friday condemned the takeover and called for an arms embargo against the country in a resolution that demanded the restoration of the country's democratic transition.

Bachelet, in her remarks, also expressed concerns about the arrest of 107 people under a new security law in Hong Kong, saying a first trial expected later this week would be an "important test of inde-

pendence for Hong Kong's judiciary."

She called on Russia to uphold "civil and political rights" and said she was "dismayed" by new measures that could curb people's right to express critical views and take part in Russia's parliamentary election in September.

She noted a Russian court decision that labeled an anti-corruption foundation led by opposition figure Alexei Navalny as an "extremist organization" and urged Russian authorities "to end the arbitrary practice" of labelling individuals, journalists and NGOs "as extremist foreign agents or undesirable organizations."

On the situation in Ethiopia's Tigray region, she derid-

ed "continued reports of serious violations of international humanitarian law and gross human rights violations and abuses against civilians by all parties to the conflict," including by Ethiopian government forces.

"Credible reports indicate that Eritrean soldiers are still operating in Tigray and continue to perpetrate violations of human rights and humanitarian law," she said, referring to troops from neighboring Eritrea. She said 350,000 people are threatened by famine.

Since mid-May, her office has had staffers in Tigray as part of a joint investigation with the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission that is expected to finish in August.

## Ethiopia votes in greatest electoral test yet for Abiy

Addis Ababa, Jun 21 (AP): Ethiopia was voting Monday in the greatest electoral test yet for Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed as war and logistical issues meant ballots wouldn't be cast in more than 100 constituencies of the 547 across the country.

The election, delayed from last year, is the centerpiece of a reform drive by Abiy, whose rise to power in 2018 seemed to signal a break with decades of authoritarian rule and led to him winning a Nobel Peace Prize the following year. He has described the poll as the nation's first attempt at free and fair elections.

Long lines of voters were seen in some parts of the capital, Addis Ababa, while security was stepped up across Africa's second most populous country. Military vehicles were parked in key locations in the capital. More than 37 million Ethiopians were expected to vote.

We need a government that brings us peace, unity and that will stop the killing everywhere, and we also need to be pulled out from these ethnic divisions," voter Desalign Shume said.

Abiy's ruling Prosperity Party, formed in 2019 by merging groups who made up the previous ruling coalition, is widely expected to cement its hold on power. The party that wins a majority of seats in the House of Peoples' Representatives will form the next government.

Opposition groups

have accused Ethiopia's ruling party of harassment, manipulation and threats of violence that echo abuses of the past. Some prominent opposition parties are boycotting the election, notably in the country's most populous region, Oromia. Others say they were prevented from campaigning in several parts of the country.

Ethiopia's election chief, Birtukan Midekssa, writing in The National Interest, acknowledged serious challenges but noted that more parties and candidates are contesting than ever before. I call on the international community to support Ethiopia on its democratic journey, stressful and imperfect though it is, she wrote in the U.S.-based magazine.

Abiy also is facing growing international criticism over the war in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region, sparked in part because Tigray's now-fugitive leaders objected to Ethiopia postponing the election last year while citing COVID-19. No date has been set for voting in Tigray's 38 constituencies.

Tigray's former leaders, who are fighting Ethiopian forces and those from neighboring Eritrea, have reported fierce new combat in recent days. Ethiopia's defense forces have called the fighting challenging because of the rough terrain. Thousands of civilians have been killed and famine has begun in what observers describe as a drawn-out guerrilla war.

## Iran's president-elect says he won't meet with Biden

**DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (AP):** Iran's president-elect said Monday he would not meet with President Joe Biden nor negotiate over Tehran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, sticking to a hard-line position following his landslide victory in last week's election.

Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi also described himself as a "defender of human rights" when asked about his involvement in the 1988 mass execution of some 5,000 people. It marked the first time he's been put on the spot on live television over that dark moment in Iranian history at the end of the Iran-Iraq war.

"The U.S. is obliged to lift all oppressive sanctions against Iran," Raisi said at the news conference.

Raisi sat in front of a sea of microphones, most from Iran and countries home to militias supported by Tehran. He looked nervous at the beginning of his comments but slowly became more at ease over the hourlong news conference.

Asked about Iran's ballistic missile program and its support of regional militias, Raisi described the issues as "non-negotiable."

Tehran's fleet of attack aircraft date largely back to before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, forcing Iran to instead invest in missiles as a hedge against its regional Arab neighbors, who have purchased billions of dollars in American military hardware over the years. Iran also relies on militias like Yemen's Houthis and Lebanon's Hezbollah to counterbalance against enemies like Saudi Arabia and Israel, respectively.

On a possible meeting with Biden, Raisi simply answered: "No." His moderate competitor in the election, Abdolnasser Hemmati, had suggested during campaigning that he'd be potentially willing to meet Biden.

The White House did not im-

mediately respond to Raisi's statements Monday. Raisi will become the first serving Iranian president sanctioned by the U.S. government even before entering office, in part over his time as the head of Iran's internationally criticized judiciary — one of the world's top executives.

The victory of Raisi, a protégé of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, came amid the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. Millions of Iranians stayed home in defiance of a vote they saw as tipped in Raisi's favor.

Of those who did vote, 3.7 million people either accidentally or intentionally voided their ballots, far beyond the amount seen in previous elections and suggesting some wanted none of the four candidates. In official results, Raisi won 17.9 million votes overall, nearly 62% of the total 28.9 million cast.

Raisi's election puts hardliners firmly in control across the government as negotiations in Vienna continue to try to save a tattered deal meant to limit Iran's nuclear program, at a time when Tehran is enriching uranium at 60%, its highest levels ever, though still short of weapons-grade levels. Representatives of the world powers party to the deal returned to their capitals for consultations following the latest round of negotiations on Sunday.

Top diplomats from nations involved in the talks said that further progress had been made Sunday between Iran and global powers to try to restore a landmark 2015 agreement to contain Iranian nuclear development that was abandoned by the Trump administration. They said it was now up to the governments involved in the negotiations to make political decisions.

Raisi's election victory has raised concerns that it could complicate a possible return to the

nuclear agreement. In his remarks Monday, Raisi called sanctions relief as "central to our foreign policy" and exhorted the U.S. to "return and implement your commitments" in the deal.

On Saudi Arabia, which has recently started secret talks with Iran in Baghdad to reduce tensions with Iran, Raisi said that Iran would have "no problem" with a possible reopening of the Saudi Embassy in Tehran and the "restoration of relations faces no barrier." The embassy was closed in 2016 when relations deteriorated.

Raisi struck a defiant tone, however, when asked about the 1988 executions, which saw sham retrials of political prisoners, militants and others that would become known as "death commissions."

After Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a U.N.-brokered cease-fire, members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, heavily armed by Saddam Hussein, stormed across the Iranian border in a surprise attack. Iran ultimately blunted their assault.

The trials began around that time, with defendants asked to identify themselves. Those who responded "mujahedeen" were sent to their deaths, while others were questioned about their willingness to "clear minefields for the army of the Islamic Republic," according to a 1990 Amnesty International report. International rights groups estimate that as many as 5,000 people were executed. Raisi served on the commissions.

"I am proud of being a defender of human rights and of people's security and comfort as a prosecutor wherever I was," he said. "All actions I carried out during my office were always in the direction of defending human rights," he added. "Today in the presidential post, I feel obliged to defend human rights."

## Chinese banks promise to step up cryptocurrency ban

**BEIJING (AP):** China's biggest banks promised Monday to refuse to help customers trade Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies after the central bank said executives were told to step up enforcement of a government ban.

Regulators appear to worry that despite the 2013 ban on Chinese banks and other institutions handling cryptocurrencies, the state-run financial system might be indirectly exposed to risks. Beijing also worries users might evade efforts to monitor and control the financial system. The four major state-owned commercial banks and payment service Alipay promised to step up monitoring of customers and block use of their accounts to buy or trade crypto-currencies.

"Customers are asked to be more aware of risks, safeguard bank accounts and not to use virtual currency-related transactions," China Construction Bank Ltd. said on its website.

Similar promises were issued by Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd., Bank of China Ltd., Agricultural Bank of China Ltd., Postal Savings

Bank of China Ltd. and Alipay, operated by Ant Group.

Promoters of cryptocurrencies say they allow anonymity and flexibility, but Chinese regulators warn that might aid money-laundering or other crimes.

Bank executives were summoned to a meeting at which they were questioned about their activities and told to "maintain financial stability and security," the central bank said in a statement.

It said cryptocurrency trading "disrupts normal economic and financial order" and can facilitate money laundering and other crime.

Regulators tightened prohibitions against handling cryptocurrencies in 2017 and publicly reminded banks about their potential risks in May, possibly reflecting concern cryptocurrency mining and trading was continuing.

Regulators in several Chinese regions have ordered cryptocurrency mining operations to shut down.

The Chinese central bank is developing an electronic version of the country's yuan that could be tracked and controlled by Beijing.

## Armenia PM party wins snap parliamentary election

**YEREVAN (ARMENIA), JUN 21 (AP):** Results released on Monday showed the party of Armenia's acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan won the snap parliamentary elections he called to ease anger over a peace deal he signed with Azerbaijan.

With all precincts counted, Pashinyan's Civil Contract party won 53.9% of the vote and former President Robert Kocharyan's bloc was a distant second place with about 21%, the election commission said Monday. A bloc affiliated with another former president came third with 5.2%, and another party had nearly 4%. Blocs

need 7% to get into parliament, however, Armenia's laws allow a third party or bloc to get seats if only two political forces pass the threshold to get into parliament.

Pashinyan called the early election after months of protests demanding his resignation because of the peace deal that he signed to end six weeks of fighting with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The agreement saw Azerbaijan reclaim control over large parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas that had been held by Armenian forces for more than a quarter-century.







**RAINBOW SEASON!** Singer Charli XCX incorporated rainbows into her performance outfit at Wynwood Pride in Miami.

## Will Smith to release memoir in November

**LOS ANGELES, JUN 21 (PTI):** Hollywood star Will Smith has announced that his first memoir, titled "Will", is set to hit the shelves on November 9. The book, which Smith has co-written with Mark Manson, will be published by Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House.

Smith shared the cover art and release date of his memoir via video announcement on Instagram and the book's website.

The actor revealed that he has been working on the book for the past two years.

"It's been a labour of love," Smith said in the video.

As per a press release shared on the website, "the memoir is the product of a profound journey of self-knowledge, a reckoning with all that your will can get you and all that it can leave behind." It traces Smith's learning curve to a place where outer success, inner happiness, and human connection are aligned.

The cover art of the book has been created by New Orleans-based visual artist Brandon "BMike" Odums.

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## Akshay Kumar begins 'RakshaBandhan' shoot, dedicates film to sister

**MUMBAI, JUN 21 (PTI):** Superstar Akshay Kumar on Monday started filming director Aanand L Rai's upcoming feature film "RakshaBandhan" and dedicated the movie to his sister, AlkaHiranandani.

"RakshaBandhan", also starring BhumiPednekar, is billed as a special tale which celebrates "relationships in the most beautiful way". Kumar took to Twitter and posted a picture with Rai from the film's set. It is the actor-filmmaker's second collaboration after their upcoming drama "Atrangi Re".

"Growing up my sister, Alka was my first friend.

It was the most effortless friendship. @aanandlrai's #RakshaBandhan is a dedication to her and a celebration of that special bond. Day one of shoot today, need your love and best wishes," the 53-year-old actor wrote. "RakshaBandhan" also features

four new faces, "Shikara" actor SadiaKha-teeb, SahejmeenKaur, DeepikaKhanna and SmrithiSrikanth, playing Kumar's sisters. The film is penned by writer couple Himanshu Sharma and KanikaDhillon.



It is presented and distributed by Zee Studios in association with Hiranandani and Rai.

The film is backed by Colour Yellow Production in association with Cape of Good Films.

## Facebook launches podcasts, live audio service

Facebook is launching podcasts and live audio streams in the U.S. on Monday to keep users engaged on its platform and to compete with emerging rivals.

Facebook says it is allowing public figures with verified accounts to start live audio rooms and invite anyone else to speak. A handful of podcasts will be available to people in the U.S. at first and the company plans to add more down the line.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who has appeared on the video streaming app Clubhouse in the past, hosted his own live audio room on his Facebook page last week.

"Live Audio Rooms and podcasts rolling out in the US is just the beginning of our audio journey," wrote FidjiSimo, head of the Facebook app, in a blog post Monday. "Looking ahead, we are working with creators who will use our audio tools to further develop and launch Soundbites — short-form, cre-

ative audio clips."

But podcasts and live audio have also been an outlet for racism, misinformation and extremist material. Live audio is particularly difficult to moderate, compared with traditional social media posts.

Facebook, which announced its audio plans to push into audio streams in April, says its rules apply to live audio and podcasts and anyone can report offending material.

"In addition, our broader integrity and safety work and the tools we have built for proactively and automatically identifying harmful content are great building blocks, but we plan to adapt tech and processes as we learn more," the company said in a prepared statement.

The company says that it may also retain live audio after it is no longer live to enforce its policies, which will be done both by human moderators and machine learning.

# VasanBala on pop-culture references: It's a beautiful reminder of why I'm making films



**NEW DELHI, JUN 21 (PTI):** A sprinkle of "nostalgia" and pop-culture references have become signature to director VasanBala's films, who says revisiting his favourite movie memories drives him emotionally as a storyteller.

The Mumbai-based filmmaker's first theatrical release, 2019's "MardKoDardNahin-Hota", was a homage to martial arts legend Bruce Lee loaded with Bollywood references starting from its title, based on megastar Amitabh Bachchan's dialogue in 1985 movie "Mard".

The story about a man, whose medical condition makes him impervious to pain, was a hit with people appreciating Bala's pulpy treatment that reminded them of films like "Shehnshah", "Gangs of Wasseypur", "Paap-KojalakarRaakhKarDoonga", "Pulp Fiction" and "Inglorious Basterds".

The director says the references are never introduced while writing the film and come in as a garnish at a much later stage.

"The references come much later. First, we are interested in deciding about what we are trying to say and what the characters are. And once we are done, then I have fun garnishing with references of films and actors and other things I love.

"I just sprinkle. It's fine even if audiences don't get those references. It gives me an emotional connect while making films," Bala told PTI in a Zoom interview.

Prior to making his feature directorial debut with 2012 movie "Peddlers", Bala was making short films. He has also served as a co-writer on filmmaker AnuragKashyap's "Bombay Velvet" and "Raman Raghav 2.0".

The writer-director said as someone who has grown up watching all the pulpy, popular and cult films from across the globe, returning to his memories is the best way to stay on track as a filmmaker.

"It's like tapping into some kind of memory bank, nostalgia or probably it's just a kind of pinch to keep reminding me why I'm doing this. It's a beautiful reminder. And if I have the opportunity to keep doing it then why not. No one needs to know all this It's about going into a moment that emotionally drives me."

The filmmaker adapted the same process for his next venture "Ray", a Netflix anthology series based on the short stories written by legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray.

The series has four episodes, each a con-

temporary interpretation of Ray's writings, with Bala directing HarshvardhanKapoor, RadhikaMadan-starrer "Spotlight".

The story revolves around a popular but creatively unsatisfied actor dealing with, his insecurities as a cult leader's presence threatens his stardom.

Bala said the team started discussing the project somewhere in 2019 and finished writing the first draft right before the coronavirus pandemic hit India.

Initially, the film was set in Varanasi but post the pandemic, they decided to shift it indoors to comply with safety protocols.

"Spotlight" also features many pop-culture references and well-defined characters.

Bala said the best way to write a story is to give every character its own life and persona.

"None of these characters are sidekicks or protagonists or anything. They all exist in their own worlds and are connected the way people are connected in real life. When the writing doesn't fall into the trap, wherein a character has to exist just to react, it's great.

"We take that approach in writing and make sure every character has its own emotions in the context of the film. There isn't an archetype we were trying to tap in. We put in all the experiences of everyone we know so that, at the human level, we all can connect to these characters," he said.

Apart from "Spotlight", the anthology features three other episodes -- "HungamaHai-KyonBarpa", helmed by AbhishekChaubey, and SrijitMukherji-directed "Forget Me Not" and "Bahuripiya".

The ensemble cast includes ManojBajpayee, GajrajRao, Ali Fazal, ShwetaBasu Prasad, Anindita Bose, Kay KayMenon, Bidita Bag, Dibyendu Bhattacharya, Chandan Roy Sanyal, AkanshaRanjanKapoor, among others

Making an almost one-hour-long visual interpretation of a writing by cinema great like Ray can be an overwhelming process, but Bala said despite the awe he believes in owning the script once on board as a director.

"I believe once a director gets into making a film, they have to own it. If a filmmaker can't own it then I don't think one should even do it because then one is participating as a consumer and not as a filmmaker. Despite the reverence and the awe, one needs to have the courage to own it," he added.

Ray will premiere on Netflix on June 25.

Aries:

It's one of those days, Aries. Nothing seems to be working out in your favour and those around you are unavailable to offer support. What do you do in such cases? Do you let the topsy-turviness of life get the better of you, or do you make a conscious effort to transmute the heavy emotions? Something tells us your sass coupled with the ability to see the silver lining in every situation will come in handy.

Tip: It's time to transmute those heavy emotions.

Taurus:

It's one of those days, Taurus. Everything looks topsy-turvy and you feel like your head is not in the right place. While what's taking place isn't in your hands, your response is. So deal with the given situation in a mature manner. Loosen the grip whenever necessary, and cut the cords if need be. Remember, no matter what transpires, you want to leave with your dignity intact.

Tip: You know what needs to be done here. Honour your inner guidance.

Gemini:

It's a 'manage your expectations' kind of day in the Gemini HQ. You may feel like the people around you are not getting your jam, despite your best efforts to make them understand where you are coming from. What do you do in circumstances such as these? Do you let the

frustration get the better of you or take charge of your emotions? Investing your time and energy in feel-good rituals will help you power through it all.

Tip: Let's just blame it on the retrograde.

Cancer:

What you resist, persists. So instead of going into denial mode, take this opportunity to delve deeper. To have a one-on-one conversation with your fears. Something tells us you're stepping into a time of inner transformation, one that will change how you perceive yourself completely. Here's a witchy tip to aid you in the process of inner alchemy: 1. Write your woes on a piece of paper. 2. Burn the sheet with the intention of clearing this energy from your life. 3. Bury the ashes as a way of transmuting the stagnant energy.

Tip: Those suppressed emotions are calling for your attention.

Leo:

Remember when you struggled to do the things that are now child's play? Don't you love how you have evolved over a period of time and become the person you are today? Word for the wise: take a moment. Step back from what you are creating as you begin to trust the process. The task at hand may seem like an impossible one for now, but with patience and persistence you will attain mastery.

Tip: You are on the road to mastery, baby! Trust the process and keep going.

Virgo:

Manifestation is not a ritual, it's a lifestyle. Read that again, Virgo. The perfect house, the perfect job, the perfect city—they're all within your reach. So, shift your vibration and get in alignment with Spirit. Something tells us big things are about to take place in your world. As such, you're also likely to feel a surge in your creative energy today. Pay attention to those out-of-the-box ideas and adopt a no-holds-barred policy with your dreams.

Tip: Get in alignment with Spirit!

Libra:

Words of wisdom courtesy Albert Einstein, "The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift." Something to think about when you find yourself delaying the decision-making process. All the answers you seek are within you, and have been within you all along. There is no need to seek external validation, Libra. Circling back to the inner landscape, some of you may be called to play the role of the mystic and hold space for your circle. Draw from your past experiences and trust yourself to be a conduit of the light.

Tip: All the answers you seek are within you, and have been within you all along.

Scorpio:

But, how do "you" perceive yourself, Scorpio? Do you see yourself as strong, independent and capable of taking over the world, or battling with crippling self-doubt in private? Remember, no amount of external validation will help you reverse the damage. You've just got to sit down with the heavy emotions. You've just got to confront the hurt and the pain. Something tells us you're an alchemist at heart, blessed with the power to turn your wounds into wisdom.

Tip: It's time to believe in your own power and potential.

Sagittarius:

Your worth is not dependent on your productivity. But that's a lesson you learned a long time ago, Sagittarius. What you're being asked to honour this weekend: the process of non-doing, the process of allowing, and the process of integrating. Oh, the miracles you will make space for when you surrender to the flow!

Tip: Sometimes, you've just got to be in yin mode.

Capricorn:

Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his description of the flow state said, "There's this focus that, once it becomes intense, leads to a sense of ecstasy, a sense of clarity; you know exactly what you want to do from one moment to the other; you get immediate feedback." This is as close as it gets to nirvana,

Capricorn, and you're about to have a taste of it in the days to come. So surrender to the process of creation. Give birth to that beautiful piece of art that you've been thinking about for days now. As you do, allow time and space to fade into oblivion.

Tip: It's all about the flow!

Aquarius:

We're all born with a unique blueprint. We all come here with a mission that can be fulfilled by us alone. While some excel in the arts, others thrive on numbers. What's special about this chapter in your life is that it is bringing forth clarity of purpose, and aligning you with fellow warriors who are playing the role of the catalyst in your path. Open your eyes to the signs, Aquarius!

Tip: It's time to get in alignment with your purpose.

Pisces:

You've been taking everything so seriously, Pisces, and the Universe wants you to know that's a real problem. What you want to do today is adopt the spirit of play. Bring an element of madness to everything you say and do. When it comes to your creative process, you're being reminded that there is no such thing as being too 'out there'. Your ideas are coming through from a sacred place and it's time for you to honour them.

Tip: Adopt that spirit of play.