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SummitTIMES

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Test positivity down to 4.9% even as Covid ends 4-day no death record in Sikkim

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 SEPT:

Sikkim's daily test positivity rate dipped to 4.9% after only 16 fresh Covid cases were picked up from the testing of 321 samples in the State over the past 24 hours. Fewer samples are tested on Sundays when the RT-PCR labs operate on reduced loads. That said, the drop in TPR is still reassuring.

Of the 16 new cases in the State, eight were registered in East District and four each in West and South districts.

On a more somber note, Sikkim ended its 4-day run of no Covid deaths with a fatality recorded at the Namchi District Hospital in the past 24 hours. Sikkim's Covid death toll currently stands at 380. Four days without any Covid deaths

is the longest Sikkim has gone in the second wave which has still not completely exited the State yet.

While 10 persons tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 178 samples yesterday, five more cases were found in RT-PCR testing of 135 samples and one more in CBNAAT of eight samples.

As per the Daily

Report of COVID-19 released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department this morning, Sikkim's tally of confirmed Covid cases currently stands at 30,971.

The number of active cases slid to 654 with 74 more persons getting discharged from home and facility isolation after making full recoveries.

The count of recovered Covid cases in the State has further improved to 29,630.

Most of the active cases are on their way to recovery under home or facility isolation and of the few requiring hospitalization, only four COVID patients are currently admitted in ICU facilities at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Foundation laid for bypass road at Chungthang



WANGCHUK BHUTIA

CHUNGTHANG, 20 SEPT:

Minister for Roads Bridges, Samdup Lepcha, who is also the area MLA, laid the foundation stone for a new connection of the bypass road at Chungthang in North Sikkim today.

During his last visit to the area, the Minister had assured the public and promised that a bypass road at Chungthang will be carried out for the convenience of the public for the

development of the area.

Minister Lepcha was accompanied by SDM-Chungthang, PWD's DE North, AE, SHO-Chungthang, General Manager (Teesta Urja) along with CLC of Lachen-Mangan, BLC, Dorjee Lopen, Monks and the general public.

The public along with SKM party workers have expressed gratitude towards the Chief Minister and the area MLA for granting the public's long-awaited demand so promptly.

Indra Jatra celebrated at Soreng, Everester Manita Pradhan felicitated

ADITYA GOLAY UNDERLINES NEED TO PRESERVE CULTURE, CALLS ON GOVT TO VACCINATE UNDER 18 YEAR OLDS

Soreng, 20 Sept [IPR]: The Newa Guthi, Soreng, celebrated Indra Jatra today at the Community Jatra here with area MLA, Aditya Golay, as chief guest, accompanied by Everester Manita Pradhan as guest of honour.

Among other special invitees were SDM-Soreng, Ranjan Rai, SDPO Mahendra Pradhan, former Chief Secretary PK Pradhan along with various chairpersons and advisors of the Government of Sikkim.

The programme was organized not just to celebrate the festival but also to commemorate Manita Pradhan for her achievement and for bringing pride and glory to the nation and the State along with the Newari community.

She was presented with the customary shawl and a token of appreciation by the chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, Ms Pradhan extended warm greetings to all the guests and officials and spoke about the importance and relevance of the festival, especially to the Newari community.

After the short summary, reminiscing her struggles and hardships, she spoke about her journey from being a nobody to joining the ranks of the few women to have climbed the Everest. She admitted that at a certain point in her career, she did feel like accepting defeat, but her sheer determination to achieve her aim kept her going.

She advised the younger generation not to give up on their dreams and aspirations,



especially when the going gets tough and face them with courage and confidence. She concluded her address by expressing her sincere gratitude towards the Chief Minister for his encouragement and also for providing her with financial aid.

She also thanked the MLA for his spontaneous assistance when asked for and remarked that she was humbled by the honour and love she has received from the community through today's recognition.

The general secretary of the organizing committee, GM Pradhan, then provided an in-depth explanation on why and how Indra Jatra is celebrated and informed that like any other indigenous group living in the State, the Newari community too can trace its roots back to Nepal but were happy and fortunate to have been born in a secular state like Sikkim where every festival is celebrated with equal zeal and appreciation.

He also thanked the IPR department for producing and showcasing the importance

and relevance of the Indra Jatra festival through a recently-released documentary.

The programme was then addressed by MLA Aditya Golay who extended warmest greetings and best wishes to everyone celebrating the festival and expressed his gratitude towards the community. He said that Sikkim is known for co-existing in peace and harmony while celebrating all the different festivals and traditional rituals.

He also shared his concern regarding the fading away of age-old traditions and cultures, especially among the younger generation.

He reached out to all the youngsters by asking them to preserve and strengthen conventional customs and beliefs.

The MLA also took the opportunity to inform the gathered attendees about the upgradation of the present community hall into a bigger and better Town Hall under the New District formation plan.

Talking on the topic of political favouritism and preferences, he strictly informed all the elected representatives to end such practices. He said that everyone must be treated with fairness and equality regardless of their political inclinations.

"Our society has to come forward in bringing about better changes. Government aids and benefits must reach those genuinely needy ones and it's our duty to provide what is their right," he added.

He also requested the Central and the State Governments for a vaccination campaign of children below the 18 years of age at the earliest. He concluded his speech by saying that he felt honoured to be a part of the celebration and that he was thankful for the invitation.

The programme ended with the presentation of token appreciation and gratitude towards the chief guest by conferring him with the traditional khada and Newari topi. The event also included cultural dances by the locals.

Sikkim in "Hey Ram" territory when it was promised "Ram Rajya": Chamling

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 20 SEPT:

Sikkim Democratic Front president, former Chief Minister Pawan Chamling, tore into the Sikkim Krantikari Morcha government in his weekly Facebook meditation and commented that where Sikkim was promised "Ram Rajya" by the SKM, it has been lamenting "Hey Ram" ever since SKM came into office here. Things in Sikkim have been good only for Chief Minister PS Tamang and his team, Mr Chamling writes as he goes into details of how Mr Tamang has delivered as Chief Minister.

He has alleged an

attack on SDF party workers immediately after the forming of the SKM government and appointment of 2,000 people, all connected to the new dispensation or top bureaucrats, in government jobs, the removal of SNT employees and threatening of OFOJ employees as early signs of nepotism in the SKM government.

The expulsion of four students from Gyalshing College "was the most regressive, oppressive and anti-education act on can imagine," Mr Chamling writes, while pointing out that an appeal by a former Supreme Court judge also

fell on deaf ears.

"When students from all over Sikkim started condemning the expulsion, this anti-education government stirred up a few students to praise the government. Such is the SKM's Ram Rajya," he adds.

Next, he mentions the protest by SPYF demanding a reconsideration of taxi fare hikes and of how instead of listening to them "the arrogant, divisive and heartless government instigated the taxi drivers to stage a counter-dharna."

The recent dharna by a section of the adhoc

teachers received an even more heavy-handed response, he adds, while also referring to how Padmashree Bhaichung Bhutia's comments on constructing a hospital on a football ground, when other options were available, were responded to with an effigy-burning episode.

"... G o l a y ' s Team burned his [Bhaichung's] effigy in the middle of Namchi bazaar, violating Covid protocols. A bunch of angry women were singing the praises of SKM's Ram Rajya and the onlookers were saying

Hey Ram," Mr Chamling writes.

The heckling of former Minister, BJP MLA Ugen Bhutia, and the alleged attack on the Health Minister by SKM functionaries and rumours of another SKM MLA being threatened, the distasteful challenge to former Minister, SIBLAC convenor Tseten Tashi Bhutia are highlighted as further examples of how the SKM Government has been failing the people of Sikkim.

He warns further that the worst is yet to come and will climax in 2024 when the next assembly elections arrive.

COVID-19: India logs 30,256 new cases



NEW DELHI, SEP 20

(PTI): With 30,256 people testing positive for coronavirus infection, India's total tally of COVID-19 cases rose to 3,34,78,419, while the active cases declined to 3,18,181, the lowest in 183 days, according to the Union health ministry data updated on Monday.

The death toll climbed to 4,45,133 with 295 more fatalities, according to the data updated at 8 am.

The active cases have declined to 3,18,181 comprising 0.95 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March 2020, while the national COVID-19 recovery rate was recorded at 97.72 per cent, the health ministry said.

A reduction of 13,977 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

Also, 11,77,607 tests were conducted on Sunday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 55,36,21,766.

The daily positivity rate was recorded at 2.57 per cent. It has been less than 3 per cent for the last 21 days.

The weekly positivity rate was recorded at 2.07 per cent. It has been below 3 per cent for the last 87 days, according to the health ministry.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease has surged to 3,27,15,105,

while the case fatality rate was recorded at 1.33 per cent, it said.

The cumulative doses administered in the country so far under the nationwide vaccination drive has exceeded 80.85 crore, according to the ministry.

India's COVID-19 tally had crossed the 20-lakh mark on August 7, 2020, 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 two crore on May 4 and three crore on June 23.

MANJUSRI PUBLIC SCHOOL

ADMISSIONS FOR 2022 ACADEMIC SESSION

Applications for admission are now being accepted for the 2022 academic session for Grades KG - IX. Last date for accepting of application is 30 September 2021 depending on availability of seats. Applications may be submitted online through the school website www.mpssikkim.edu.in or at the City Campus office, M.G Marg.

Telephone enquiries may be directed to
Mr. Christopher Rai: 03592 203093, 9474838324

Chungyal Complex, M G Marg, Gangtok, Sikkim 737101
Email: mpsadmin@mpssikkim.edu.in

MoS Finance calls on Governor



SUMMIT REPORT GANGTOK, 20 SEPT:

Union Minister of State for Finance, Pankaj Chaudhary, called on Governor Ganga Prasad at Raj Bhavan today, an official press release informs.

The MoS is on a three-day visit to Sikkim and during the courtesy call on the Governor, informed him about

the various ongoing developmental projects in the State.

The Minister of State appreciated the development that has taken place in the country under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Governor presented an Om Thangka and a Choktse to the MoS, the press release from Raj Bhavan informs.

Vanijya Saptah begins in Sikkim

GANGTOK, 20 SEPT (PIB): As part of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, Department of Commerce under Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India is organizing Vanijya Saptah from 20 to 26 Sept, 2021 across the country to commemorate the monumental occasion of 75th Anniversary of Indian Independence. Various events to showcase the potential of our exporters and manufacturers during this week are being organised

Under these celebrations, the Department of Commerce and Industries, Government of Sikkim, Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) and Spices Board are organizing Vanijya Utsav, Exporters' Conclave at State level in Sikkim on 21 Sept, 2021. The conclave will be held at Directorate of Handicrafts and Handloom (DHH), Zero Point in Gangtok with the theme of 'Showcasing India as a Rising Economic Force focussing on Sikkim'. An Exhibition having 20 stalls with participation of various sectors including agro-produce, spices, food processing, dairy, handicrafts, handloom, tourism, pharma will be put up at this venue. This will be followed by an interaction with various stakeholders. Chairman, Man Bahadur Chettri, Department of Commerce and Industries, Government of Sikkim will be the Chief Guest and inaugurate the exhibition. He will also handover subsidy under Large Cardamom Replantation Scheme, implemented by Spices Board in

Sikkim, to the farmers. Advisor, Kado Tshering Namka, Department of Commerce and Industries, Government of Sikkim will be the Guest of Honour.

A panel discussion will be held at the Conference Hall, Udyog Bhawan, Upper Tadong on 22 Sept, 2021. Representatives of various State and Union Government departments, agencies, entrepreneurs and other stake holders will participate. These events aim to bring together all the relevant stakeholders under a single platform by highlighting the progress made in exports and manufacturing from Sikkim, to further promote products with export potential from the State and identify issues faced by exporters in the State with the focus on strategies to improve the export scenario.

A district level Exporters' Conclave will be held at Udyog Bhawan, Upper Tadong in Gangtok for East district on 24 Sept, 2021. A similar Exporters' Conclave for North District will be held on the same day at KVK Hall, Mangan. The Exporters' Conclave for South and West Districts will be held between 24 and 26 Sept, 2021. These conclaves will showcase the District as Export Hubs by displaying products and services from the respective districts with export potential focusing on export promotion, manufacturing, investment and employment generation through export growth.

All the prospective entrepreneurs and exporters are being invited to these programmes.

Anurag Thakur interacts sports ministers to discuss road map for bigger sports events

NEW DELHI, 20 SEPT [PIB]: Union Minister of Youth Affairs & Sports, Anurag Singh Thakur, interacted with Sports Ministers of States and Union Territories across India on virtual mode today.

Following the major success of the Olympics and Paralympics in Tokyo, today's meeting was to draw the road map to prepare our athletes for the future Olympics, Asian Games and Commonwealth Games and how States are contributing to promote sports at grass root level. During the virtual meeting Secretary of Department of Sports Ravi Mittal was also present.

During the discussion, the Minister asked the States and UTs to send their feedback on making a common pool of cash awards for the athletes where both the Central and the State Governments can accumulate the funds, so that players of all states will get equal benefit after winning medals.

Sports is a State subject and the overall motive of the interaction was to urge them to organize sporting events across rural and urban areas for able-bodied and para-athletes as well as play a key role in the identification of talents at grassroots level. The promotion of school level sports and support to the School Games Federation of India (SGFI) was



another key point of discussion.

After the meeting, Anurag Thakur said that today's meeting was very fruitful and we have agreed to meet at least twice in a year to evaluate the progress and how we can come up with better infrastructure, more coaches and more trainers and physiotherapist.

Thakur added that we will be holding regional meetings in various zones. Apart from that we will be looking to create a Dashboard, where the data related to sports infrastructure will be available of each state, district, block.

The dashboard will give all relevant information like how

many coaches are available, what kind of sports will be played in those indoor stadium or outdoor games etc and all these details will be available at the click of a button.

Thakur also said that there will be a talent hunt programme for various sports, so that we can catch them young and train them well for future events. Thakur further said that we have requested the states to have more events and competitions to give greater exposure to the athletes, so that they can participate in more events at the State level, District level and the National level.

Thakur added that as Prime Minister says

about cooperative federalism, all the states will come together along with national sports federations, educational institutes, central government as well as other stakeholders to prepare our athletes for the future championships and also to create better infrastructure to win more medals in the future.

At present, there are 24 KISCES across 23 States and UTs while 360 KICs have opened across various districts in the country. Thakur requested the States to contribute to their full capacity in giving the future champions of India with all the crucial amenities including best of coaching,

infrastructure, medical facilities.

The Fit India movement, launched on National Sports Day 2019 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also has been a game changer in inculcating the habit of fitness through various campaigns conducted thereon, like the Fit India Freedom Run, the Fit India Mobile App, Fit India Quiz, etc. Thakur requested the State and UT Sports Ministers to participate and promote the above campaigns. Thakur also urged States and UTs to send in proposals to open up KISCES, KICs as well as academies to further the cause of strengthening the sports ecosystem of the nation.

Himanta Sarma in Nagaland as Centre resumes Naga peace talks

GUWAHATI, 20 SEPT [NDTV]: Assam Chief Minister and BJP's northeast strategist Himanta Biswa Sarma will travel to Nagaland as centre resumes dialogue with Naga political talk teams.

The talks would continue under the 2015 framework agreement that was signed by the centre and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) for paving way to the final solution.

Stalled last year after the Naga rebel group had blamed then Nagaland Governor RN Ravi for creating "unnecessary confusion" and almost derailing the peace process with his "reckless statements", New Delhi has once again



started to make some 'crucial moves' to resume the talks.

Apart from NSCN-IM, the centre is also separately holding the peace talks with eight other Naga armed groups which came together a few years ago under the banner of "Naga National Political Groups" or NNPGs.

Himanta Biswa

Sarma, who is also the convenor of the Northeast Democratic Alliance (NEDA) - the BJP led anti-congress political platform with regional parties in the northeast - is likely to meet the leadership of the NSCN-IM and NNPGs on Tuesday.

Mr Sarma and his Nagaland counterpart Neiphiu Rio have been

tasked by Home minister Amit Shah to build a 'political' way forward with the leaderships of Naga groups.

Sources said the centre has been trying everything possible to solve the Naga political issue.

While Assam Governor Professor Jagdish Mukhi has been given additional charge

of Nagaland, former Intelligence Bureau (IB) special director AK Mishra is performing the interlocutor's task after Mr Ravi was transferred.

Mr Sarma is expected to hold a meeting with NSCN-IM general secretary Th Muivah, who has been leading the negotiations with the centre after the death of its Chairman Isak Chisi Swu in 2016, during his visit to Dimapur.

The Isak Muivah-led NSCN had entered into a ceasefire with the Centre in 1997 and have held over 100 rounds of talks - within and outside the country - since then.

All the issues, except NSCN(IM)'s demand for separate flag and own constitution, have been addressed.

Javed Akhtar condemns Kabul Mayor's order asking working women to stay home

MUMBAI, 20 SEPT: Lyricist and scriptwriter Javed Akhtar has expressed his discontent and appealed to all the Muslim bodies to collectively condemn the order by the mayor of Kabul telling women to stay at home.

Taking to Twitter, Mr Akhtar wrote, "Aljazeera has reported that the mayor of Kabul has ordered all working women should stay at home. I expect all important Muslim bodies to condemn it because it is being done in the name of their religion. Where are all those who were till yesterday shouting in defense of 3 talaq?"

The Kabul mayor has

said that more than 2,900 people work in Kabul's city economy. Out of those, 27 per cent of them being women who work as local representatives in district offices, in revenue and construction engineering, he added.

This comes as a number of women in Afghanistan have been protesting against the Taliban government, demanding equal rights in all spheres of life.

Separately, work-

wise, Akhtar, who started his career through screenwriting later shifted to penning lyrics for some of the most loved Bollywood songs revolving around love, loss and life.

Bureaucrats around "to pick our slippers", says Uma Bharti in now viral video

BHOPAL, 20 SEPT [NDTV]: Senior BJP leader Uma Bharti, in a series of controversial comments undermining the bureaucracy, has said that officials are around only "to pick up our slippers" and have "no standing (aukat)".

The video of her comment has been widely shared since Saturday.

"Bureaucracy is nothing. Bureaucracy is there to pick up chappals (slippers). It picks up our slippers. We only allow that," the former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister and ex Union Minister bragged at an event.

"You think bureaucrats control politicians? No. First there are discussions in private and then the bureaucracy prepares a file and gets it. Ask me - for 11 years I have been Union Minister and chief minister. First we have a discussion and then the file is processed. It's all nonsense that bureaucracy controls the politicians. They can't... what is their standing? We are giving them a salary, we are giving them postings, we are giving them promotions and demotion - what can they do? The truth is we use them for our politics," said the saffron-robed politician.

Uma Bharti, 62, made the comments before an OBC (Other Backward Classes) delegation that visited her at her home in Bhopal on Saturday. The group reportedly raised their demand for a caste-based census and quota in private jobs, and threatened protests if the Madhya Pradesh BJP government did not decide quickly.

The opposition Congress called the comments shameful and demanded a clarification.

"Will Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan clarify whether bureaucrats actually pick up slippers of politicians," Congress leader KK Mishra demanded.

Kuki National Front chief held in Delhi

NEW DELHI, SEP 20 (PTI): Self-styled commander-in-chief of Kuki National Front Mangkhohlam Kipgen, who was wanted in cases of kidnapping and extortion, was arrested by the Delhi Police's Special Cell, an official said on Monday.

The Kuki National Front is a northeast-based insurgent group.

Mangkhohlam Kipgen alias David Kipgen, 24, was arrested from Dwarka on Sunday, Deputy Commissioner of Police (Special Cell) Pramod Singh Kushwah said.

Several cases related to kidnapping, firing, extortion, robbery among others are registered against Kipgen in various police stations of Manipur, the DCP said.

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SKM's CLC-level coordination meeting reaches Chujachen

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 SEPT:

Sikkim Krantikari Morcha's constituency-level committee coordination meeting was held at Melatar, Rongli, for Chujachen today, a party press release informs.

SKM has been organising such meets to improve the functioning of party-related works for the smooth functioning of the Government, the release explains while adding that a large number of people from the constituency assembled for the meeting today.

UDD Minister Arun Upreti; chairperson Information Technology Department, Nawraj Gurung, SKM general secretary [HQ] Pawan Gurung; advisor to the CM, Rohit Raj Maharaj; Namcheybong MLA Em Prasad Dulal; Rehnock MLA, Bishnu Khatiwara; Tshering Bhutia, the



Gnathang-Machong party in-charge; Ganga Parsai, chairperson Labour Department; Damber Pradhan, SKM's area in-charge for Chujachen; Bikash Basnet, Confidential Secretary to the CM; Inchung Bhutia, SKM general secretary, Press & Media; BP Bhandari, vice president in-charge, Zone II; Sahadev Sharma, SKM youth chief convenor; Prabha

Pradhan, SKM Nari Morcha vice convenor; Boom Tshering Yonzon, SKM press & publicity [HQ] and other party office bearers were also in attendance.

In his address, the party's area in-charge for Chujachen, Damber Pradhan, infomed that he has proposed a priority list of the constituency's needs such as tourism development at

Lunchok, Lingtam, Phadamchen, Aritar; upgradation of roads and schools and construction of auditoriums, hostels, hospitals, the release states.

A mass joining programme was also held today during which 418 families joined the party from five wards.

The chief guest, in turn, urged people not

to fall for propaganda being spread by SDF supporters and focus instead on future plans and programmes of the party.

He further informed that the road situation will be improved soon and while hearing the grievances of the people, stressed that people should come forward and speak up since SKM was the party of the people.

Meeting discusses late NB Bhandari birth anniv plans

SORENG, 20 SEPT [IPR]: The first meeting for the state-level celebration of the birth anniversary of former Chief Minister of Sikkim, the Late Nar Bahadur Bhandari, was convened at the conference hall of the Sub-Division Administrative Centre here today.

The meeting was chaired by MLA Aditya Golay and had the presence and participation of SDM (Soreng), Ranjan Rai, SDPO (Soreng), Mahendra Pradhan, BDO (Soreng), Sabina Limbu, department officials, chairpersons along with the members of the Nar Bahadur



Bhandari Janma Jayanti Samaroh Samiti.

Addressing the meeting, the MLA said that the celebration this year will be held in adherence

to Covid-norms and guidelines issued by the Government.

Since this was the pre-coordination meeting, he said that the next scheduled meeting will

be held on 22 September when the roles and responsibilities of the respective departments will be assigned.

He also informed that the venue for the

celebratory event would be decided at the next meeting. He urged everyone to gear up and be prepared as there is not much time left for the preparations.

"Offensive, racism": Shashi Tharoor, Jairam Ramesh slam UK vaccine rules

NEW DELHI, 20 SEPT [NDTV]: A new travel advisory by the United Kingdom - which says people from India and a few other countries will be considered "unvaccinated" even after two doses of AstraZeneca's Covishield (in use globally as Vaxzervria) - has renewed controversy over freedom of international travel during the pandemic.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said he had cancelled multiple engagements because of the rules - which were announced by the UK government Friday and will come into effect on October 4 - and that it was "offensive to ask fully vaccinated Indians to quarantine".

"Because of this I have pulled out of a debate at the Cambridge Union (the world's oldest debating society) and out of launch events for the UK edition of my book The Battle Of Belonging...

It is offensive to ask fully vaccinated Indians to quarantine. The Brits are reviewing!"

Mr Tharoor's party colleague, Jairam Ramesh called the rules "racist".

"Absolutely bizarre considering Covishield was originally developed in the UK and The Serum Institute, Pune, has supplied to that country too! This smacks of racism," he tweeted.

The new rules reflect the UK's decision to scrap its 'amber' list from October 4.

India is currently on that list and has not yet been moved to the expanded 'green' list - countries whose vaccines are recognised by the UK.

Starting October 4, therefore, passengers not vaccinated under "approved programs in the UK (and UK overseas), Europe or US" must self-quarantine for 10 days, as well as pay for two Covid tests.

They can pay for an early test to be released from quarantine.

EPFO adds 14.65 lakh members in July

NEW DELHI, SEP 20 (PTI): Retirement fund body EPFO recorded net new enrolments of 14.65 lakh in July, giving a perspective of formal sector employment in the country.

The provisional payroll data of EPFO (Employees' Provident Fund Organisation) released on Monday showed a growing trend, with 14.65 lakh net payroll additions during July 2021.

Net new enrolment with the EPFO in June this year was revised downwards to



11.15 lakh from the provisional estimates of 12.83 lakh released last month.

The data showed that net new enrolments stood at 8.9 lakh in April and 6.57 lakh in May this year.

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic began in mid-April this

year which forced many states to impose fresh lockdown restrictions.

The data is provisional as updation of employees' records is a continuous process and gets updated in subsequent month/s, the EPFO added.

The estimates may include temporary employees whose contributions may not be continuous for the entire year, it further stated.

EPFO manages social security funds of workers in the organised/semi-organised sector in India.

Muzaffarnagar riots case: Court acquits 20 people

MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP), SEP 20 (PTI): A local court here on Monday acquitted 20 people due to lack of evidence in connection with the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots case.

Additional District Sessions Judge Baburam acquitted them, saying the prosecution failed to provide evidence against them.

According to the prosecution, the Special

Investigation Team (SIT) probing the riots cases had filed a chargesheet against 21 persons under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for allegedly burning several houses and looting during the riots at Kutbi village in the district on September 8, 2013. One person died during the pendency of the case.

A total of 98 cases of

riots have been decided so far in which 1,137 accused were acquitted due to lack of evidence.

Police had registered 510 cases and arrested 1,480 people in connection with the riots.

After investigation, the SIT filed chargesheets in 175 cases.

Over 60 people died in the communal clashes and 40,000 were displaced.

Olympians felicitated at KIIT-Odisha, stadiums named after Pramod and Dutee



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 20 SEPT:

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology [KIIT], Bhubaneswar, Odisha, rolled out the red carpet for Olympians, Pramod Bhagat [who won a Badminton gold in Tokyo Para-Olympics] and Dutee Chand, both of whom are associated with KIIT.

The university also announced today to name two stadiums on its campus after the two Olympians.

Also today, KIIT and KISS founder, Dr Achyuta Samanta, felicitated Mr Bhagat and honoured

him with a cash prize of Rs 5 lakh. The indoor stadium at Campus-12, where also trained is being named after him while he has also been named for an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.) from KIIT.

Ms Chand, apart from the synthetic athletic stadium at the KIIT campus named after her, she is also being considered for an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Letters (D.Litt.). Ms Chand, it may be mentioned here, became the first woman from the country to win

a Gold Medal in the World University Games representing KIIT.

Also today, another World Champion, Rakkhal Sethy, was presented a cheque of Rs 2.7 lakh for a wheelchair to participate in the Fencing Para World Cup coming up in November.

"Recognition and support to these outstanding athletes will not only encourage them, but also encourage other aspiring athletes and sports persons to strive for bringing more and more laurels to the nation," a press communiqué from KIIT explains.

KVK-Namthang hosts prog on campaign on Poshan Vatika and International Year of Millet

NAMCHI, 17 SEPT (IPR):

A daylong programme was organised at KVK Namthang South Sikkim focussing on Nutri Garden under the National Campaign on Poshan Vatika and Plantation Programme in which the participants comprised of Anganwadi and ASHA workers, Kanyas, farmers and Extension functionaries of line department. The programme was graced by OSD RMDD, Bimal Kharel as the chief guest. He was accompanied by CDPO (Social Justice and Welfare Department), Laxmun Tamang.

At the onset of the programme, the guest visited the display of the different millet based value added food products

wherein Subject Matter Specialist (Agriculture Extension), Karma Peden Bhutia spoke on to create awareness of Millets for the International Year of Millet 2023 followed by virtual programme of the address by Union Minister of A&FW, Narendra Singh Tomar.

Senior Scientist and Head KVK South Sikkim, LP Shivakoti welcomed the guest and gave a brief highlight of the programme and the work done by KVK.


During the programme, lecture through PowerPoint was done by Subject Matter Specialist (Horticulture)-Yangchenla Bhutia, She expressed the importance of Nutri Garden for diet diversification and bio-fortified varieties.

CDPO Social Justice

and Welfare Department, Laxuman Tamang spoke about the timeline of Poshan Abhiyan, women and child related health care and the initiative taken by the department.

MLHP, Kesang Diki Bhutiaspokeabouttheroleof Nutrition and its importance related to women, maternal and child health. During the programme, Nutri-garden seed were also distributed to the participants.

The chief guest of the programme highlighted on the health benefits of millets and its Nutritional value. He urged the farmers to take more interest in millet farming as it is nutritious and contains many health benefits. The programme concluded with a plantation drive at KVK farm.



STATE POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD SIKKIM
FOREST AND ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM
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F.No. 351/SPCB/3181 Dated: 8.9.2021

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Department of Forest & Environment,
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Deorali , East Sikkim.

R.O. No. 192/IPR/Pub/Class./21-22
Date: 10.9.2021

India to resume export, donations of surplus Covid vaccines next month

NEW DELHI, 20 SEPT [NDTV]: India will resume the export and donations of excess vaccines next month, Union Health Minister Mansukh Mandaviya announced on Monday, a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits the US where the issue

was likely to be raised by President Joe Biden.

India, the world's biggest maker of vaccines overall, stopped vaccine exports in April to focus on inoculating its own population as infections exploded. The government wants to vaccinate all of its 94.4 crore adults by

December and has so far given at least one dose to 61 per cent of them. The resumption of exports deliberations come ahead of PM Modi's visit to Washington starting Tuesday where vaccines are likely to be discussed at a summit of the leaders of the Quad countries - the

United States, India, Japan and Australia.

The renewed export drive, known as 'Vaccine Maitri' will prioritise the global vaccine-sharing platform COVAX and neighbouring countries first, Mr Mandaviya said.

He said that since April, the country's

monthly vaccine output has since more than doubled and is set to quadruple to over 300 million doses next month

Total production could top 100 crore in the last three months of the year as new vaccines from companies such as Biological E are likely to be approved, he said

Scaring People Away From Real Stories

Governments have always wanted to silence media, now they are succeeding

Two news websites, one of which is funded exclusively by its subscribers, was visited by an Income Tax Department team out on a survey! Both news platforms would qualify as bootstrap ventures when compared to the crores that the godi media swims in. Shortly after that, a journalist was arrested for reporting the place of arrest of a terrorist wrong. This is what the sarkar is doing to scare journalists, but is only an extension of what the government's favourite money-bags have been doing all along; remember the criminal defamation case filed against another website for a report it put together from government documents about the staggering increase in the finances of a strongman politico's son's business soon after his father hit the peak of his power and influence. The report, while it was arguably uncomfortable for the protagonists of the story, was neither incorrect nor speculative. It was watertight, something that none of the IAS, IPS and IRS bouncers that the government sends out on fishing expeditions into the homes and offices of journalists and activists are yet to come up with. In fact, none of the journalists, media houses, activists or NGOs targeted with such strong-arm tactics have been doing anything exceptional – they have all been doing their job as professionally as they can. Whether it is the rights of the underprivileged or the marginalized or the whimsical nature of Covid management or unabashed communalism of those who took office after accepting the Constitution which has secularism written into it, these are necessary stories, and some of them are even boring and not revelatory in that they are not saying anything new. But in these times of personality cults and rabid intolerance, even putting things on record is frowned upon. Even plain reportage sans commentary attracts reprisals. Elsewhere, a satirical reference to GST in a Tamil film raised BJP's hackles to such an extent that they demanded that the lines be taken out because they misrepresented facts. Apart from the fact that if facts were made sacrosanct for movies then only the credits [and may be even not those] can ever be shown.

As the world has learned, when it comes to the ultra-Right, nothing hurts them more than ridicule, and since they lack self-awareness or sense of humour, facts, because they expose them, mock them. These tactics often fail in slapping down their targets into submission, but that is not always the intention. The message of these actions is for the fence-sitters who are served a warning to kowtow or face blow-back. This ploy is working. Take a look around, those sitting on the fence have not budged, they hold their peace... finger-on-lips type.

And this is where things are getting worrisome not just in the country but also the world over. Media houses being slapped with defamation cases is not new, but the public aggression, ridicule and even violence is increasingly being normalized. It is fine for individuals to hold opinions, even wrong ones, but it is not okay for, let's say the constitutional bodies of the country to pounce on anyone they see as being critical of the great leader or his satraps. When this happens, the doors are opened for the fringe to become even more vicious and pressure grows on those who officers and institutions who want to do their jobs right, for the nation and not the political "masters." Of course, the bigger media houses can take the challenge and enter into a stare-down, like CNN and New York Times and Washington Post had done in America, and some exceptions like Newslaundry and NewsClick can stand their ground despite their David size in comparison to the Goliath, but not all media has the resources or the will to engage in such long-drawn bitterness. Much the same is obviously planned when big-ticket defamation cases are filed. It is unlikely that the petitioners even expect to win in court, but what they have already won outside is scare everyone else into silence and away from the story. Even readers would have noticed that investigative and analytical journalism has suddenly disappeared from most of the traditional media space. What such intimidation also achieves is that it ties up the resources and time of the sued groups and hobbles their pursuit of other stories.

But every democracy needs a strong and professional media so it becomes important for the "public" to step up. Remember the Tamil film episode mentioned earlier? Public support was quick and strong and forced the BJP to tone down, and more importantly, gave the filmmakers the courage to stand fast. In America, White House belligerence has increased viewership, sales and advertisements to media outlets being painted as "fake news". Newslaundry has announced a spike in subscriptions since the IT survey hassle. These are not new readers or viewers or advertisers. These are people who had shifted to other platforms and are now returning as an expression of support for free expression and real news. We need to ensure that such engagements are seen more often and in more places.

What Nigerians told us about their mental health under COVID-19 lockdown

LEVI OSUAGWU, KINGSLEY EMWINYORE AGHO & RICHARD OLORUNTOBA

THECONVERSATION.COM

In Nigeria, mental illness is highly stigmatised and mental healthcare is not widely available. Resources, facilities and health staff are in short supply and disorders may not be well understood at the primary healthcare level.

It's been estimated that 80% of individuals with serious mental health needs in Nigeria cannot access care. With fewer than 300 city-based psychiatrists for a population of over 200 million, caring for the mentally ill is typically left to family members.

This situation could worsen as Nigerian health professionals emigrate.

Unattended mental illnesses can have severe consequences for homelessness, poverty, employment and safety. They can affect children's chances of success at school and result in family and community disruption. Mental problems also add to the burden on the systems of healthcare, policing, education, criminal justice, and social services.

The COVID-19 pandemic is known to have put pressure on people's mental health all over the world, owing to uncertainty and losses of various kinds. Nigeria is not an exception. Uncertainty diminishes how well people can prepare for the future, and thus contributes to anxiety, stress, confusion, anger and substance abuse.

We conducted a survey to assess how well people were coping in seven sub-Saharan African countries under COVID-19 lockdowns in March 2020. Nigeria was one of the countries; the others were Ghana, Cameroon, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda. We looked for prevalence of mental health symptoms and negative emotional reactions.

Although COVID-19 infections and deaths are lower in Nigeria than in some countries, the prevalence of mental health symptoms in Nigeria and across sub-Saharan Africa suggested that the population might be vulnerable to emotional distress. Better care should be available.

MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN NIGERIA

We undertook a survey of 2,032 adults

using WhatsApp, Facebook and emails between April and May 2020, a period when many African countries were under lockdown. Most African countries, Nigeria among them, responded to the pandemic with strict nationwide lockdown measures which disrupted the day-to-day lives of the public and shrank economies. Only certain groups received financial support from their governments.

Our survey included adult respondents. The majority (556, or 27%) were from Nigeria. Of these, 38% were aged 18-28, 54% were males and over half were married (55%). Most (94%) had at least a bachelor degree and 60% were employed at the time.

We asked participants to report whether they felt anxiety, worry, anger, boredom or frustration during lockdown.

Almost all the Nigerians reported mental health symptoms (500, or 89.9%). About half of Nigerians reported feeling anxious (44.9%) or worried (47.1%). Almost a third reported being frustrated (31.7%). A sixth were angry (18.5%) and almost two-thirds (59.2%) reported being bored during the lockdown.

Prior to the lockdown, the Nigerian government had said that three in 10 Nigerians suffered from one form of mental disorder or another. Our findings indicate that COVID-19 may be adding to the country's mental health burden.

We also found that Nigerian males over 28 years, and those who were married or unemployed, were more likely to report mental health and emotional symptoms. In a country with already high rates of unemployment, the impact of massive job losses in the pandemic cannot be underestimated.

Our data revealed that 16.6% of the Nigerian respondents lived alone. Participants living with more than six people (28.2%) in the household were more likely to report feeling anxious, angry and frustrated. Participants with families of their own seem to be more likely to be emotionally burdened during the lockdown.

IMPLICATIONS

Our findings challenge the view that communal life is a protection from mental

health issues. It is also at odds with World Health Organisation guidelines encouraging individuals to stay with friends and families to reduce isolation during the lockdown.

Access to and use of orthodox mental healthcare services is low and social opportunities are also under strain as a result of rising insecurity. This points to further mental health pressure down the line.

Our research also showed that individuals perceiving themselves or their family members to be at lower risk of infection, or of dying from COVID-19, reported lower rates of worrying about the virus. Hence, one emotional coping strategy may be to be less concerned about the impact of COVID-19. This may, however, result in less action to prevent the spread of infection.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Nigerian government needs to be convinced of the importance of adequate mental healthcare. It must make effective treatment and adequate facilities and resources available. Appropriate remuneration and conditions of service are needed to halt the "brain drain" of staff.

Mental health should be an integral part of public healthcare at all levels.

The mass media can be deployed to share the survivor experiences of mental health patients. Educational campaigns are needed to help the public understand mental illnesses and the benefits of seeking orthodox care.

Research on the effects of the pandemic brings to the fore opportunities for health authorities to discuss and address those challenges.

[Levi Osuagwu is Research fellow, Western Sydney University; Kingsley Emwinyore Agho is Associate Professor, Western Sydney University; Richard Oloruntoba is Associate Professor of Supply Chain Management & Supply Chain Management Lead, Curtin University]

Rising Inflation: unless we act now, it will not be temporary

ALEXANDER TZIAMALIS

THECONVERSATION.COM

Consumer price inflation in the UK rose by 3.2% year on year in August, the highest annual rise in nearly a decade. This was 1.2 percentage points above the July number, making it the biggest month-on-month rise since records began in 1997. Inflation is also an issue far beyond the UK: in the US, it is currently running at 5.3%, for instance.

Bank of England economists conveniently attribute these hefty rises to temporary factors and claim that inflation will soon stop rising in the UK without much intervention. They point out that prices a year ago were artificially subdued and as they returned to more "normal" levels, we were destined to get high measures of inflation.

One example would be petrol prices. Subdued demand for commuting helped to lower them to about 113p per gallon at the pump in 2020, yet as travel returned to pre-pandemic levels, increased demand for petrol has pushed prices to around 135p. Or you could look at the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, which lowered the prices people paid in restaurants in summer 2020. As the scheme ended, prices hiked suddenly, which increased inflation.

The argument from the optimists is that these one-off shifts will wash through the system and prices will stabilise at their current levels. Yet not all price hikes can be attributed to temporary factors. There are also deeper, structural factors at play.

WHAT CAUSES INFLATION

Inflation is measured by the Office for National Statistics, which records the prices of thousands of products. These

prices are defined by a never-ending interplay between supply and demand in the economy (assuming the government doesn't intervene to fix prices in some way).

An abundance of excess produce or services means that prices are likely to fall, as we saw with petrol prices. On the other hand, demand for products that can't be fully satisfied by the supply usually pushes prices higher. This happened with hand sanitisers in 2020, for instance, and more recently with second-hand cars.

Besides COVID, Brexit has certainly affected prices. It has rendered trade with the UK's neighbouring countries more difficult and expensive. This is contributing to shortages of products, pushing prices up.

Brexit has also hindered production in the UK by alienating a percentage of EU nationals working in the country. Shortages of fruit pickers, lorry drivers and NHS nurses have been pushing wages higher and making UK production more expensive. And there is the potential for more political and trade disruptions between the UK and EU, not least over Northern Ireland, which could make products and production even more expensive.

Another structural factor relevant to inflation is the British pound. The UK imports hundreds of billions of pounds worth of consumer products and raw materials. A lower pound sees the country paying more of its currency to purchase products from abroad, making these products more expensive in pounds.

The pound has already been weakening against its rivals for

several years due to economic factors like weaker productivity. This falling trajectory is also likely to continue due to political factors such as the looming second Scottish independence referendum and civil unrest in Northern Ireland.

Also, as the Bank of England keeps turbocharging the economy with vast amounts of money through quantitative easing (QE), there should be downwards pressure on the value of the pound. The only thing that spares the pound from big falls is the fact that central banks of other major currencies are doing the same – for the time being.

Loose monetary policy also potentially contributes to higher inflation for another reason. Record low interest rates encourage consumers to borrow, while QE encourages banks to lend more, since it boosts the value of the assets on their balance sheets. This can fuel demand for products such as cars, electronics and white goods (such as washing machines, dishwashers and fridges). Indicatively, though house prices are (wrongly) not counted in consumer price inflation, low interest rates have contributed to substantially higher prices in that market, as well as in stock market shares.

WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

A little inflation in an economy can be positive, to the extent that it spurs consumers to buy things before the price rises. It is also a way of lowering the government's debts in real terms, which is attractive after the massive borrowing to pay for the COVID stimulus package.

High inflation is a problem, though, as it erodes people's real incomes, meaning they consume less and businesses make less money. This is why the Bank of England was granted independence from the UK

government in the 1990s, with a mandate to keep inflation around 2%.

The UK government and Bank of England should therefore work to address some of the longer term, structural factors which can pin inflation consistently high – particularly when "supply shocks" like a new COVID variant or trade sanctions on China could further imbalance supply and demand in the short to medium term.

Shortages of people and skills in the labour market must be addressed before the production capacity of the UK is scarred by more businesses relocating and outsourcing production. Through Brexit, the UK public voted to take control of migration, not shut it down when it's needed.

Free trade in products and services with UK's neighbouring continent is also paramount for the country's long-term competitiveness, but here things are admittedly difficult. The EU will never accept the existential danger of a country benefiting from its massive free market without fully subscribing to its policies and regulations. Damage control seems to be the only way forward here, which underlines the importance of reaching a lasting agreement with the EU over Northern Ireland.

Finally, the Bank of England should consider taking its foot off the QE accelerator sooner rather than later, before inflation expectations are crystallised into further price increases. Money that is too abundant and ultra-low interest rates not only inflate asset prices but also boost corporate borrowing and provide a temporary lifeline to zombie companies, laying the groundwork for the next crisis.

[the writer is Senior Lecturer in Economics, Sheffield Hallam University]

Mamata Banerjee among top frontrunners for PM post in 2024: Babul Supriyo

Babul Supriyo formally joined Trinamool Congress on Saturday after he had quit the BJP following the recent Union cabinet reshuffle.

Kolkata: Former union minister Babul Supriyo, who joined Trinamool Congress on Monday, said West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is among the top frontrunners for the prime ministerial post in 2024.

"I want that the captain of our party Mamata Banerjee becomes the Prime Minister in 2024. Opposition plays an important role in a democratic system. Nobody can deny the fact that Mamata Banerjee is among the top frontrunners for the prime ministerial post," Mr Supriyo told ANI.

Notably, Trinamool's party mouthpiece "Jaago Bangla" had recently sparked a row by saying Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has failed to become an alternative face to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. It said Chief Minister Banerjee is the potential alternative to PM Modi.

Asked about why he switched to the Trinamool, Mr Supriyo said, "I have not created



any history by changing the party. A horde of leaders joined Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from other parties before the West Bengal Assembly polls. There are resentments among the old leaders. BJP should ask them about their resentments."

On post-poll violence, he said, "Post-poll violence is not desirable. It is being probed. I want that compensation should be provided to people who were affected by post-poll violence."

The former minister of state for environment, forest and climate change on Saturday formally joined

Trinamool Congress after he had quit the BJP following the recent Union cabinet reshuffle.

The sitting MP joined the Trinamool family in the presence of National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee and Rajya Sabha MP Derek O'Brien.

After joining Trinamool, Mr Supriyo had told ANI, "I accepted the opportunity given to me by Didi (Mamata Banerjee) and Abhishek. I left politics wholeheartedly and I am accepting the opportunity wholeheartedly. I met Abhishek Banerjee. The work to be done for Bengal was presented



before me. I am excited. I want to work under the leadership of Didi. I will meet Didi on Monday."

Earlier in August, Mr Supriyo said he will continue to work constitutionally as a Member of Parliament but had withdrawn himself from active politics.

"I will continue to work constitutionally as an MP in Asansol. Politics is beyond the constitutional post and I withdraw myself from it. I will not join any other party. I will vacate the MP bungalow in Delhi and release security personnel from their duties soon," Mr Supriyo had told ANI.

BJP says it won't field candidate for Bengal Rajya Sabha Bypoll



The decision will pave the way for election of the ruling Trinamool Congress nominee, Sushmita Dev, unopposed.

Kolkata: The main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in West Bengal today said it will not field a candidate for the October 4 Rajya Sabha bypoll, a development that will pave the way for election of the ruling Trinamool Congress nominee unopposed.

The Trinamool had last week named Sushmita Dev, who recently joined the party after quitting the Congress, as its candidate for the by-poll. Ms Dev, the daughter of veteran Congress leader from Assam the late Santosh Mohan Dev, was the

chief of the women's wing of the Congress. She is likely to file her nomination today, sources close to her said.

The by-election has been necessitated as Trinamool's Manas Bhunia quit the Rajya Sabha after winning the assembly election from Sabang in Paschim Medinipur.

"BJP will not nominate any candidate for Rajyasabha bypoll due in West Bengal. Outcome is predetermined. Our focus is to make sure unelected CM to be unelected once again. Jai Ma Kali," Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari tweeted.

Mr Adhikari, who defeated Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in Nandigram, was apparently referring to her contesting

by-election from Bhabanipur assembly seat in Kolkata.

In an earlier by-election for a Rajya Sabha seat in July, the BJP had decided against fielding its nominee. TMC candidate and former Prasar Bharati CEO Jawhar Sircar had got elected unopposed.

The BJP had won 77 of the 292 seats in the March-April assembly elections and the Trinamool Congress 213. The ISF and GJM had bagged one seat each.

BJP MLAs Nisith Pramanik and Jagannath Sarkar resigned to retain their Lok Sabha seats, bringing down the party's strength in the Assembly to 75. Four other BJP legislators switched over to the TMC but are yet to resign as MLAs.

Heavy rains pound Kolkata

KOLKATA, SEP 20 (PTI): Torrential rains lashed Kolkata and neighbouring districts since the early hours of Monday, throwing normal life out of gear on the first working day of the week, as the Met forecast more downpour for at least another day.

More than 100 mm rain was recorded at different places in the city from 1 am to 7 am, submerging many important thoroughfares and low-lying areas under knee-deep water.

The drainage pumping stations of Kolkata Municipal Corporation recorded

136 mm rain at Dhapa, 115 mm at Kalighat and 109 mm at Ballygunge, an official said.

The Met department has forecast more heavy rain or thunderstorms till Tuesday morning in most districts of south Bengal, including in Kolkata.

"Due to movement of cyclonic circulation from north-west Bay of Bengal to Gangetic West Bengal and strong moisture incursion, heavy rainfall is occurring over Kolkata and adjoining North and South 24 Parganas, Howrah, Hooghly and Purba Medinipur," regional Met director GK Das said.

As per the Met department figures for 24 hours till 8.30 am on Monday, Kolkata received the highest rainfall in West Bengal at 142 mm.

The other places which recorded heavy precipitation during the 24-hour period are Canning (113 mm) in South 24 Parganas, Salt Lake (112.8 mm) and Dum Dum (95 mm) in the northern outskirts of Kolkata, as per the Met department data.

There were fewer vehicles on the streets since morning, but traffic snarls were caused owing to very slow movement because of submerged thoroughfares.

Himanta Sarma in Nagaland tomorrow as Centre resumes Naga peace talks

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Sarma and his Nagaland counterpart Neiphiu Rio have been tasked by Home minister Amit Shah to build a 'political' way forward with the leaderships of Naga groups.

Guwahati: Assam Chief Minister and BJP's northeast strategist Himanta Biswa Sarma will travel to Nagaland as centre resumes dialogue with Naga political talk teams.

The talks would continue under the 2015 framework agreement that was signed by the centre and National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM) for paving way to the final solution.

Stalled last year after the Naga rebel group had blamed then Nagaland Governor RN Ravi for creating "unnecessary confusion" and almost derailing the peace process with his "reckless statements", New Delhi has once again started to make some



'crucial moves' to resume the talks.

Apart from NSCN-IM, the centre is also separately holding the peace talks with eight other Naga armed groups which came together a few years ago under the banner of "Naga National Political Groups" or NNPGs.

Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is also the convenor of the Northeast Democratic Alliance (NEDA) - the BJP led anti-congress

political platform with regional parties in the northeast - is likely to meet the leadership of the NSCN-IM and NNPGs on Tuesday.

Mr Sarma and his Nagaland counterpart Neiphiu Rio have been tasked by Home minister Amit Shah to build a 'political' way forward with the leaderships of Naga groups.

Sources said the centre has been trying everything possible to

solve the Naga political issue.

While Assam Governor Professor Jagdish Mukhi has been given additional charge of Nagaland, former Intelligence Bureau (IB) special director AK Mishra is performing the interlocutor's task after Mr Ravi was transferred.

Mr Sarma is expected to hold a meeting with NSCN-IM general secretary Th Muivah, who has been leading the negotiations with the

centre after the death of its Chairman Isak Chisi Swu in 2016, during his visit to Dimapur.

The Isak Muivah-led NSCN had entered into a ceasefire with the Centre in 1997 and have held over 100 rounds of talks - within and outside the country - since then.

All the issues, except NSCN(IM)'s demand for separate flag and own constitution, have been addressed.

'Had a very good discussion': Babul meets Mamata

KOLKATA, SEP 20 (PTI): Former Union minister Babul Supriyo, who joined the Trinamool Congress last week, met Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday.

Supriyo, the BJP MP from Asansol, visited state secretariat Nabanna to meet Banerjee.

"It was great meeting 'Didi'. We had a very good discussion. I thanked her for giving me an opportunity to work for Bengal and serve the people.

I am really touched by the affection and warmth of 'Didi' and Abhishek Banerjee," he told reporters after the meeting.

Asked about his role in the TMC, Supriyo said it was for the party to decide.

"I have nothing to say about it. It is for the party and our supreme Mamata Banerjee to decide. It is her prerogative," he said.

This was Supriyo's first meeting with Banerjee after he joined the TMC on Saturday.

Missing boy's body found floating in pond in UP



BULANDSHAHR (UP), SEP 20 (PTI): The body of a two-year-old boy who had gone missing was found floating in a pond in Bulandshahr district of Uttar Pradesh on Monday, police said.

The boy had gone missing under mysterious circumstances on Sunday in Bilona Chhap Bangar

village in the Debai police station area of the district, the police said.

His uncle lodged a missing complaint with the police late Sunday evening after he failed to trace the boy.

Early Monday, a neighbour saw the body floating in the pond, the police said

VIDEO NEWS SECTION

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Sandhu ends T-22 and Sharma finishes T-27 in Dutch Open

Cromvoirt (The Netherlands), Sep 20 (PTI): Indian golfer Ajeetesh Sandhu faltered in the final round with an even-par 72 to end tied 22nd at the Dutch Open here.

Sandhu slipped seven places from his T-15 position after the third round. He totalled 11-over 299 for the tournament.

Shubhankar Sharma, who began the week superbly with 70-66, let it slip over the weekend with 74-70 and finished T-27th.

SSP Chawrasia, who had an up-and-down week with a 67 on the second day followed by 82 on third, ended the week just the way he started with a 75 and was 77th.

Kristoffer Broberg ended a six-year drought as he claimed an emotional victory at the Dutch Open. The Swede won by three strokes after holding his nerve down the final stretch.

For Sandhu, who had 69s on first three days, the bogeys on 15th and 16th ended his hopes of a Top-15 finish.

Sharma, trying to avoid dropping bogeys as he did in round three, played a bogey free 70 with just two birdies.

Broberg, 35, said he went through "six years of hell" before battling his way back to triumph at Bernardus Golf. He won back in 2015 BMW Masters after a play-off with Patrick Reed.

Matthias Schmid (66) and Alejandro Canizares (68) seemed to pile pressure but Broberg held on despite dropped shots at the par five 12th and the 14th.

Broberg holed a long birdie putt at the par-three 17th to almost seal the event and then finished it with a par.

Schmid earned his best European Tour finish with an outright second place on 20-under, courtesy of a final round 66. Canizares claimed the third place despite a double-bogey finish and a 19-under total.

CONTACT

SUMMIT TIMES REPORTERS

SINGTAM 8170070813

MANGAN/ DIKCHU 9832612485/ 9434011213

GANGTOK 9800571148

8116388176

9832424750

8016270440

Court seeks Centre's stand on Manika Batra's plea over table tennis match

The petition alleges that on one occasion, the national coach Soumyadeep Roy "pressurized" Manika Batra to "throw away a match" to enable one of his personal trainees to qualify for the Olympics 2020.

New Delhi: The Delhi High Court has sought the Centre's stand on a petition by Manika Batra, who was left out of the Indian contingent for the upcoming Asian Table Tennis Championships, assailing Table Tennis Federation of India's (TTFI) mandate of compulsory attendance at the National Coaching Camp in order to be selected.

Justice Rekha Palli granted two days to the central government counsel to take instructions on the petition which alleges that on one occasion, the national coach Soumyadeep Roy "pressurized" Manika Batra to "throw away a match" to enable one of his personal trainees to qualify for the Olympics 2020 and seeks that the Sports Ministry "enquire into the management" of the federation.

The judge said the allegations against the coach were serious and the Centre should be a little proactive.

"There is something to be said. We have a high ranking player. We have to balance... If there are such senior allegations against the coach, Union of India has to be a little bit proactive on this,"

Ruturaj played a remarkable innings, says CSK coach Stephen Fleming



DUBAI, SEP 20 (PTI): Chennai Super Kings head coach Stephen Fleming has lavished praise on young opener Ruturaj Gaikwad, saying he absorbed the pressure and played a "remarkable" innings which gave the team a chance against defending champions Mumbai Indians in their IPL match here.

Gaikwad hit a match-winning unbeaten 88 as CSK posted 156 for 6 after being reduced to 24 for four inside the powerplay.

"Today's innings was very special. It's okay to play an innings in a high-scoring game and dominate. But when you're the one to get a score to give your team a chance, then that's even more special," Fleming said at the post-match press conference.

"So, the way he went about his work, it had really absorbing pressure and then the ability to accelerate as the innings went on, it really was down to his hand, that we were able to create any pressure whatsoever. So, it was a remarkable innings from



said the judge.

"Let them (Centre) come back with instructions. Ultimately she is the highest-ranking player in the country today," the judge added.

Senior counsel Sachin Dutta, appearing for Manika Batra, said that by virtue of a rule on mandatorily attending the national camp, his client's chance for the 25th ITTF Asian Table Tennis Championships, 2021, which is to be held in Doha from September-October, has been scuttled in spite of her fulfilling all merit-based criteria.

He urged the court to stay the rule to enable her to participate in another international event scheduled for November.

"There is an event in November. This regulation be stayed

immediately. It will kill my career," Mr Dutta said as he highlighted that personal coaching is encouraged in several other sports.

The counsel for the federation denied all allegations and said that the national coach was not even present at the national camp.

In the petition, the Commonwealth Games gold medallist and Khel Ratna awardee has alleged that the federation was carrying out its selection processes in a non-transparent manner, targeting certain individuals such as herself and acting completely contrary to the interest of sports and sportspersons.

She has asserted that the national coach, in a clear conflict of interest, was running a private table tennis academy

could be broken, but the good news, it is not.

"And Deepak Chahar was cramped and will check that out tomorrow. So hopefully fingers crossed, they both will come through reasonably, okay.

In the game against Mumbai Indians, CSK skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni came out to bat ahead of Ravindra Jadeja and Fleming said the call was taken based on the match situation.

"It is very much (based on the) situation. In India, we had some really good starts and we looked at the left and right hand combination. So, we're getting into the back end of the innings," he said.

"When the captain made the call today it was much different. We haven't been in this situation for some time, if at all.

"So, the captain wanted the responsibility and it was right, so it was a good call but it's very much situational and just a little bit of a gut feel in the match situation, with a left hander or MS goes up. So, it's good to have those options.

George Fochive scores go-ahead goal. Timbers beat LAFC 2-1

PORTLAND, ORE. (AP): George Fochive scored the go-ahead goal on a header in the 68th minute and the Portland Timbers beat Los Angeles FC 2-1 on Sunday night.

The Timbers (11-10-4) moved into fifth place in the Western Conference and extended their undefeated streak to five games.

Dairon Asprilla had an early goal for Portland. Cristian Arango tied it on a penalty in the first half, his fifth straight game with a goal.

"These were a huge three points, a very important one for us," Fochive said. "We were home so we owed it to ourselves to push for it. I think we managed the game pretty well, but we needed to win this game. So I think when I came in I was trying to take a little bit more chances, going forward, just putting numbers in there, and then just defending harder than them."

Los Angeles (9-10-6) had won three in a row. It had an eight-game winless streak this summer to drop to 11th in the standings, but rebounded and went into the game in eighth, just a point back of Portland and Minnesota.

"A hard loss," LAFC coach Bob Bradley said. "I thought our

overall mentality was really good, some big chances that we didn't take advantage of, and in a tight, hard, hard fought game, really would have been important for us to get to 2-1 with the lead."

Portland went ahead in the 21st minute on Asprilla's header. But a short time later a handball in the box gave LAFC a penalty that Arango buried. Portland's Sebastian Blanco was handed a yellow card for arguing that the ball hit him on the side, not on the arm. It was Arango's fifth straight game with a goal.

Fochive scored his second goal of the season to break the stalemate. LAFC had a chance to tie it again with a dangerous free kick in the 77th, but Brian Rodriguez's kick went over the wall and wide.

It appeared that Felipe Mora added another goal for the the Timbers in the 86th minute, but it was ruled offside after a video review.

Carlos Vela (right quad) and Eduard Atuesta (right ankle) remained out of LAFC's lineup because of injury.

The Timbers tied Colorado 2-2 on Wednesday. LAFC was coming off a 2-1 victory at Austin on Wednesday.

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Jin Young Ko wins rain-shortened Cambia Portland Classic

WEST LINN, ORE. (AP): Jin Young Ko won the rain-shortened Cambia Portland Classic on Sunday for her second victory in her last three LPGA Tour starts.

Making her first start since the Tokyo

Olympics, the second-round South Korean player closed with a bogey-free 3-under 69 at Oregon Golf Club for a four-stroke victory over Jeongeun Lee and Su Oh. Ko finished at 11-under 205.

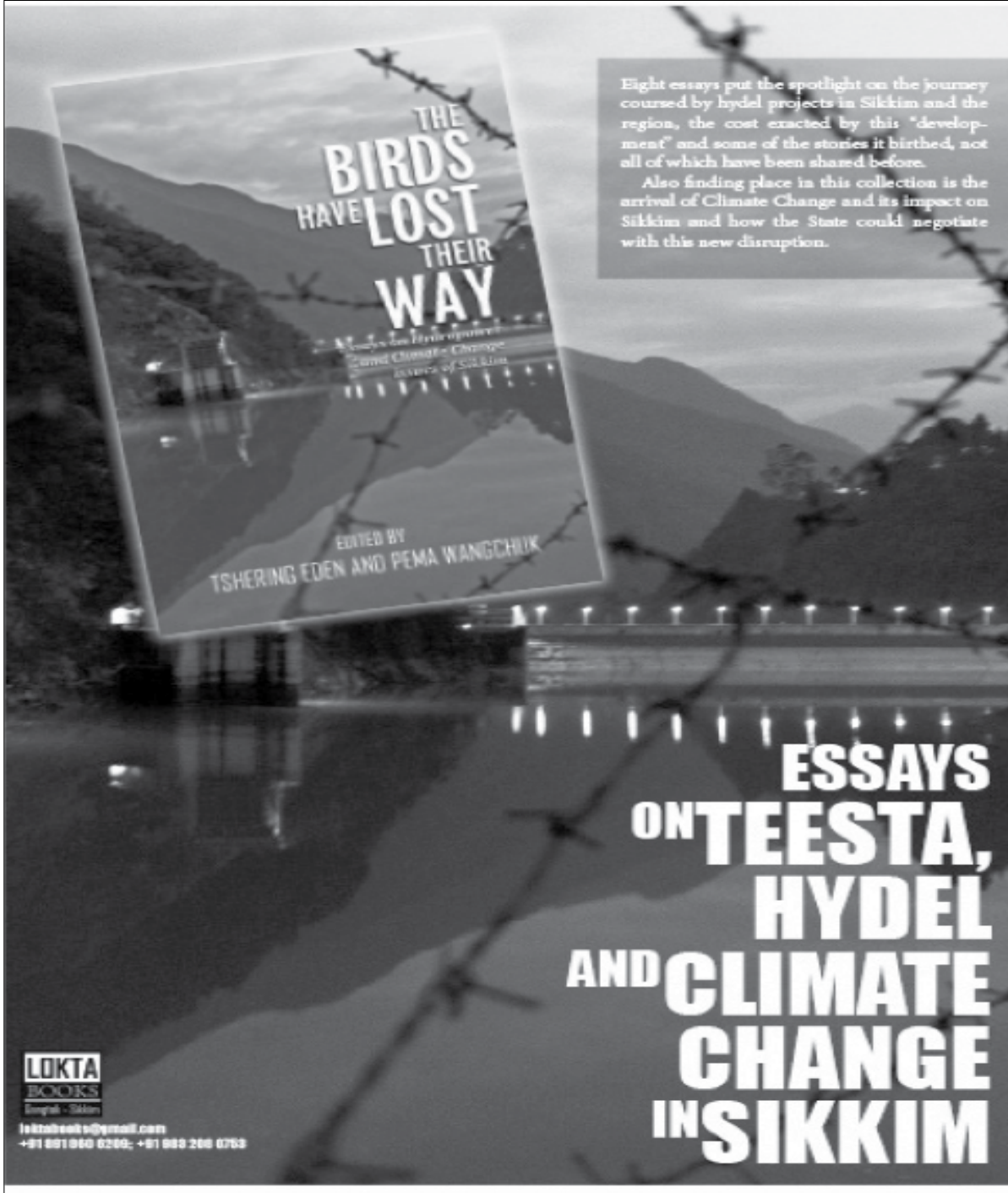
Play was washed out

Saturday because of rain and the event was cut from 72 to 54 holes. Ko took the lead Friday with a 67.

"I really wanted to play yesterday, but we couldn't play," Ko said. "I tried to make a no bogey-free round today,

but I made it. I had a lot of missed shots and I had a lot of missed chipping or something, so I had to make great par saves, but I made it.

She took a break after the Olympics, skipping the major Women's British Open.



Parents laud Chinese rules aimed at kids' 'unhealthy' gaming

BEIJING, SEP 20 (AP): Li Zhanquo's two children, aged eight and four, don't have their own smartphones, but like millions of other Chinese children, they are no strangers to online gaming. If my children get their hands on our mobile phones or an iPad, and if we don't closely monitor their screen time, they can play online games for as long as three to four hours each time, he said. Not anymore. Like many other parents, Li is happy with new restrictions imposed on online game companies that took effect early this month. They limit children to just three hours weekly of online games time an hour between 8 p.m. and 9 p.m. on Friday, Saturday and Sunday most weeks. The restrictions are a tightening of rules set in 2019 that banned children from gaming overnight and limited them to 90 minutes game time most weekdays. The 90-minute restrictions, however, did not allay authorities' concerns over addiction to online gaming. Experts say it's unclear if such policies can help prevent addiction to online games, since children might just get engrossed in social media. Ultimately, it's up to parents to nurture good habits and set screen time limits. The new rules are

part of a campaign to prevent kids from spending too much time on entertainment the communist authorities consider unhealthy. That also includes what officials call the irrational fan culture" of worshipping celebrities. The restrictions reflect growing concern over gaming addiction among children. One state media outlet has called online games spiritual opium, in an allusion to past eras when addiction to the drug was widespread in China. Adolescents are the future of the motherland, and protecting the physical and mental health of minors is related to the vital interests of masses, and in cultivating newcomers in the era of national rejuvenation, the Press and Publications Administration said in a statement issued along with the new rules, alluding to a campaign by Chinese President Xi Jinping to cultivate a healthier society for a more powerful China. Government reports estimated in 2018 that one in 10 Chinese minors were addicted to the internet. Centers have sprung up to diagnose and treat such problems among children. The responsibility of ensuring that children play only three hours a day falls largely on Chinese gaming companies like NetEase



and Tencent, whose wildly popular Honor of Kings mobile game is played by tens of millions across the country. Companies like Tencent have set up real-name registration systems to prevent young users from exceeding their game time limits, and have incorporated facial recognition checks that require users to verify their identities. The companies say they can limit access to users who are underage using the real-name registrations. In some cases, sporadic checks will also be conducted during gameplay with the use of facial recognition, and users will be booted out of the game if they fail such checks, they say. Regulators ordered gaming companies to enforce the new regulations and tighten examination of their

games to ensure they don't include harmful content such as violence. Chinese regulators have also set up a platform that allows the public to report on gaming companies they believe are violating restrictions on online game times for children. It enables holders of Chinese ID cards to report violations and furnish proof, effectively giving the public the power to police gaming firms such as Tencent and NetEase. It's unclear what penalties companies may face if they fail to strictly enforce the regulations. Even if such blanket policies are enforced it is also unclear whether they can prevent online addiction, given that game companies design their products to entice players to stay online and come back for more, said Barry Ip, a senior lecturer at University of Hertfordshire who has done research on gaming and addiction. And children may just switch to short-video and other apps if they are forced to stop playing games. There are many forms of digital platforms that could potentially hold a young person's attention just as well as gaming, said Ip. It's just as easy for a young person to spend four hours on TikTok in the evening rather than play games if their time is uncontrolled. Short-video apps such as Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, are extremely popular in China and are not subject to the same restrictions as games, though they do have youth mode features

said Liu Yanbin, mother of a 9-year-old daughter in Shanghai. Many parents attribute their children's suffering grades to gaming, but I disagree with this sentiment, said Liu Yanbin. As long as children don't want to study, they will find some way to play. Games may be restricted now but there's always short video, social media, even television dramas. Instead of relying on the government to intervene, parents need to take responsibility for limiting time spent on games, social media or the internet, experts say. The focus should be made on prevention, for example, informing parents about how games function, so that they are in a better position to regulate the involvement of their children, said Jo l Billieux, a psychology professor at the University of Lausanne. Li, the father of two young children, said he plans to arrange piano lessons for his daughter, since she has shown an interest in learning the instrument. Sometimes due to work, parents may not have time to pay attention to their children and that's why many kids turn to games to spend time, he said. Parents must be willing to help children cultivate hobbies and interests so that they can develop in a healthy manner.

N Korea slams US over submarine deal, warns countermeasures

SEOUL, SEP 20 (AP): North Korea has criticized the US decision to provide nuclear-powered submarines to Australia and warned of unspecified countermeasures if it finds the deal affects the North's security. State media on Monday published comments from an unidentified North Korean Foreign Ministry official who called the arrangement between US, Britain and Australia an "extremely dangerous act" that would destroy the security balance in the Asia-Pacific and trigger a "chain reaction of arms races". The official said the North was closely examining the deal and would proceed with corresponding actions if it has even the smallest negative affect on our country's safety." US President Joe Biden revealed last week a new alliance including

Australia and Britain that would deliver an Australian fleet of at least eight nuclear-powered submarines. Biden has stressed the vessels would be conventionally armed. The announcement triggered an angry reaction from France, which accused Australia of concealing its intentions to back out of a USD 66 billion contract for French majority state-owned Naval Group to build 12 conventional diesel-electric submarines. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison blamed the switch on a deteriorating strategic environment in the Indo-Pacific, a clear reference to China's massive military buildup that has gained pace in recent years. The North Korean official made an apparent reference to the French complaints, saying that the United States was

being accused of backstabbing even by its allies. The official said the North supports the views of China and other countries that the deal would destroy "regional peace and security and the international non-proliferation system and intensify arms races". "The current situation shows once again that (our) efforts to bolster national defense capabilities based on long-term perspectives should not be eased by even a bit," the official told the Korean Central News Agency. The North has suspended its testing of nuclear bombs and intercontinental-range ballistic missiles that could hit the U.S. mainland since 2018 when leader Kim Jong Un initiated diplomacy with former President Donald Trump while attempting to leverage his arsenal for badly needed sanctions relief. Nuclear negotiations

between Washington and Pyongyang have stalled since the collapse of a second Trump-Kim meeting in 2019, when the Americans rejected North Korean demands for major sanctions relief in exchange for dismantling an aging nuclear facility, which would have amounted to only a partial surrender of its nuclear capabilities. While maintaining its self-imposed moratorium on nuclear and ICBM tests, the North has continued testing shorter range weapons threatening U.S. allies South Korea and Japan in an apparent effort to pressure the Biden administration over the stalled diplomacy. The North this month tested a new cruise missile it intends to eventually arm with nuclear warheads and demonstrated a new system for launching ballistic missiles from trains.

Volcano erupts on Atlantic island; lava destroys some homes

LOS LLANOS DE ARIDANE (SPAIN), SEP 20 (AP): A volcano on Spain's Atlantic Ocean island of La Palma has erupted after a week-long buildup of seismic activity, prompting authorities to step up plans for evacuating thousands as lava flows destroyed isolated houses and threatened to reach the coast. The Canary Islands Volcanology Institute reported the initial eruption near the southern end of the island, which saw its last eruption in 1971. Huge red plumes topped with black-and-white smoke shot out along the Cumbre Vieja volcanic ridge, which scientists had been closely watching following the accumulation of molten lava below the surface and days of small earthquakes. Authorities immediately evacuated over 1,000 people, but Spain's Civil Guard said it might need to evacuate up to 10,000 residents. La Palma, with a population of 85,000, is one of eight volcanic islands in Spain's Canary Islands archipelago off Africa's western coast. At their nearest point, the islands are 100 kilometers from Morocco. A 4.2-magnitude quake was recorded before the volcanic eruption, which took place in an area known as Cabeza de Vaca on the western slope as the ridge descends

to the coast. As the eruptions continued, at least two open mouths belched bright red magma into the air that then flowed in tight streams down the mountain slope. Shortly after the initial explosion rocked the area, one black lava flow with a burning tip immediately slid toward houses in the village of El Paso. Mayor Sergio Rodriguez said 300 people in immediate danger were evacuated, roads were closed and authorities urged the curious not to approach the area. The lava eventually reached some homes, causing at least one chalet with a tower to crumble. Authorities warned that the lava flows could also threaten the municipalities of El Para so, Alcal and surrounding areas. Carlota Mart n was at an agricultural plot her family has in Todoque, just downhill from the eruption site, when she heard a huge explosion. "When we saw the column of smoke, we thought it could not be real, but it kept growing and we knew we had to get out of there," she told The Associated Press. "You leave, but you are also looking back because you want to see what will happen. Nobody knows how the lava flows will descend, but our plot and lots of houses in the area could be in the way." Mariano Hernandez, president of La Palma island, said there were

no immediate reports of deaths or injuries but the lava flows made him concerned "about the populated areas on the coast." "People should not come near the eruption site where the lava is flowing," Hernandez said. "We are having serious problems with the evacuation because the roads are jammed with people who are trying to get close enough to see it." Itahiza Dominguez, head of seismology of Spain's National Geology Institute, told Canary Islands Television that although it was too early to tell how long this eruption would last, prior "eruptions on the Canary Islands lasted weeks or even months." The last eruption on La Palma 50 years ago lasted just over three weeks. The last eruption on all the Canary Islands occurred underwater off the coast of El Hierro island in 2011. It lasted five months. Volcanologist Vicente Soler of Spain's Higher Council said "the material appears to be very fluid, the lava flows will reach the sea sooner or later. The scientific committee of the Volcano Risk Prevention Plan said part of the island's southwest coast was at risk for landslides and rock falls. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez cancelled his trip to New York to attend the U.N. General Assembly so he could travel from Spain's mainland to the Canary Islands.

Shooting at Russian university leaves 8 dead, 24 hurt

MOSCOW (AP): A gunman opened fire at a university in Russia on Monday morning, leaving eight people dead and 24 hurt, officials said. The gunman was detained after the shooting at Perm State University, according to the Interior Ministry. There was no immediate information on his identity or possible motive. Students and staff at the university locked themselves in rooms, and the school urged those who could leave

the campus to do so. The state Tass news agency cited an unnamed source in the law enforcement as saying that some students jumped out of windows of a building during the attack. The university, which has 12,000 students enrolled, said about 3,000 people were on the campus at the time of the shooting. The school is in the city of Perm, which is about 1,100 kilometers (700 miles) east of Moscow with a population of about 1 million. The perpetrator used



a gun designed to fire non-lethal rubber or plastic projectiles, the university press service said. Such weapons can be modified to fire other ammunition. State news agency RIA-Novosti cited local officials as saying the gunman owned the weapon legally.

The Health Ministry said 24 people were hurt — 19 from bullet wounds. It was not clear how the others were injured. In May, a gunman opened fire at a school in the city of Kazan, killing seven students and two teachers.

After delay, Lebanese lawmakers convene to approve Cabinet

BEIRUT (AP): Lebanese lawmakers convened Monday to confirm the country's new government following a power outage and a broken generator that briefly delayed the start of the parliament session. It took some 40 minutes before electricity came back on. The incident, which underscored the deep crisis roiling the small Mediterranean country amid an unprecedented economic meltdown, was derided on social media. Lebanese have been suffering electricity blackouts and severe shortages in fuel, diesel and medicine for months, threatening to shut down hospitals, bakeries and schools. Lines stretching several kilometers (miles) of people waiting to fill up their tanks are a daily occurrence at gas stations across the country. The economic crisis, unfolding since 2019, has been described by the World Bank as one of the worst in the world in the last 150 years. Within months, it had impoverished more than half of the population and left the national currency in freefall, driving inflation and unemployment to previously unseen levels. A new government headed by billionaire businessman Najib Mikati was finally formed earlier this month after a 13-month delay, as politicians bickered about government portfolios at a time when the country was sliding deeper into financial chaos and poverty. The new government is expected to undertake critically needed reforms, as well as manage public anger and tensions resulting from the planned lifting of fuel subsidies by the end of the month. Lebanon's foreign reserves have been running dangerously low, and the central bank in the import-dependent country has said it was no longer able to support its \$6 billion subsidy program. The government is also expected to oversee a financial audit of the Central Bank and resume negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a rescue package. Few believe that can be done with a government that leaves power in the hands of the same political parties that the public blames for corruption and mismanagement of Lebanon's resources. Lawmakers are to debate the new government's policy statement before a vote of confidence is held on Monday evening — a vote which Mikati's proposed Cabinet expects to win with the support from majority legislators. Mikati, one of Lebanon's richest businessmen who is returning to the post of prime minister for the third time, pledged to get to work immediately to ease the day-to-day suffering of the Lebanese.

Actor Sonu Sood to NDTV: "i have declined Rajya Sabha seats twice"

Sonu Sood, who recently faced income tax raids at his Mumbai home and offices, said he's a law abiding citizen and gave whatever documents and details the officials asked for.

Mumbai/New Delhi: Actor Sonu Sood today denied allegations of tax evasion and illegal funding, days after tax raids at his Mumbai home and offices. Calling himself a law-abiding citizen, he also revealed that he had received offers of a Rajya Sabha seat from two parties but he was "not mentally ready" to join politics.

"Whatever documents, details they asked for, we gave. Whatever questions they asked, I answered. I did my part, they did theirs. Whatever questions they raised, we answered each and every one of them with documents. That's my duty. We are still providing documents...it is part of the process," the actor told NDTV in his first interview since the raid.

"I make sure every single penny donated by anyone in this universe is accounted for."

On the Income Tax department's allegations that he violated the law, he said, "Of course not."

Earlier today, Sonu Sood also put out a statement on the raids at his properties in Mumbai for four days in a row last week. The 48-year-old actor, whose philanthropic efforts during



the Covid crisis won huge praise and even earned him the moniker "messiah", has been accused of evading taxes worth over ₹ 20 crore. The tax department also said his charity set up in July last year collected donations of over ₹ 18 crore but only ₹ 1.9 crore has been spent on relief work.

"It is very surprising. Whatever we collect is not just money donated by citizens. A chunk of that is also my remuneration from brand endorsements. I ask them to donate to charity which can save lives," he said.

"I have 54,000 unread mails, thousands of messages on WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter. It will not even take 18 hours to finish 18 crores. But I have to make sure every single penny is used in a proper way, for a genuine and needy person."

The money, he added, had not been lying around for years but only for three-four months and he had to do due diligence before supporting a cause.

As for the charge that he had received foreign funding illegally, he said he "can't get a single dollar into my account". The money was going directly to beneficiaries, said Sonu Sood.

According to the actor, the taxmen agreed that he had done "good work".

"I asked them - have you ever seen this kind of documentation, details, paperwork? They said no...they were also happy with whatever they were seeing. They said it was the smoothest four days of raids for them."

Some parties have linked the raids to his recent collaboration with Arvind

Kejriwal's Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for a school education mentorship.

"I am not allying with AAP. You call me into any state - Karnataka, Gujarat, I will go immediately, like magic. I have worked in all states -- those ruled by BJP, Congress..."

He revealed that he had turned down offers of a Rajya Sabha membership because he didn't feel ready for politics just yet. "I declined two offers of Rajya Sabha seats from two different parties. Mentally I was not ready. I am currently happy in my place. Whenever I am ready, I will shout from the rooftops that I am ready," he said.

For now, he said, he would continue with his charity, no matter what. "I didn't start to stop. It's just the beginning," the actor grinned.

Sony Pictures Films India announces slate of over 17 Indian and Hollywood releases

MUMBAI, SEP 20 (PTI): Sony Pictures Films India is set to have around 17 releases over the next one year, including Bollywood and Hollywood biggies like the Taapsee Pannu starrer "Loop Lapeta", Mahesh Babu's "Major", superhero film "Spider-Man: No Way Home" and "Venom 2- Let There Be Carnage", the studio announced on Monday.

The studio, which recently released writer-director Rensil D'Silva's "Dial 100" and Satramm Ramani's comedy "Helmet", will launch four new directors this year, it said in a statement.

They will release Balwinder Singh Janjua's (writer of 'Saand Ki Aankh' and 'Mubarakani') directorial debut, "Tera Kya Hoga Lovely", starring Ileana D'Cruz and Randeep Hooda.

Billed as a rib-tickling comedy that "grapples with India's unrelenting obsession with fair skin", the film is set in the backdrop of Haryana and chronicles the story

of a dusky girl tamed by prejudices and biases held by the society against dark skin.

The film is written by Janjua, Rupinder Chahal and Anil Rodhan.

"Loop Lapeta" is directed by ad filmmaker Aakash Bhatia and also stars Tahir Raj Bhasin.

The film is the official adaptation of the German film "Run Lola Run" and is produced by Sony Pictures Films India, Tanuj Garg, Atul Kasbekar, and Aayush Maheshwari.

"Loop Lapeta" is written by Vinay Chhawal, Ketan Pedgaonkar and Aakash Bhatia.

The studio has also joined hands with filmmaker Ram Madhvani with Amita Madhvani's Ram Madhvani Films (RMF) for a big-screen underwater thriller "Dive". The film is written by Renuka Kunzru.

Well-known ad filmmaker Nitin Parmar will make his directorial debut with RMF.

The studio will also

release "Saale Aashiq", which marks the directorial debut of writer duo Siddharth-Garima. "Saale Aashiq" is a "unique take on honour killings and is a romance-drama that is young, raw and thrilling," the release said.

Among the films by seasoned directors is the Sabbir Khan directorial, "Nikamma". The action drama stars Abhimanyu, Shirley Setia and Shilpa Shetty. The film is produced by Sony Pictures Films India and Sabbir Khan Films.

Director Umesh Shukla has come on board to helm "Aankh Micholi". Billed as a family entertainer, the film stars Abhimanyu, Mrunal Thakur, Paresh Rawal, Sharman Joshi, Abhishek Banerjee, Vijay Raaz, Divya Dutta, Darshan Jariwala and Grusha Kapoor.

The studio also has "Major", a film based on the life of Major Sandeep Unnikrishnan who was martyred during the 26/11 attacks.

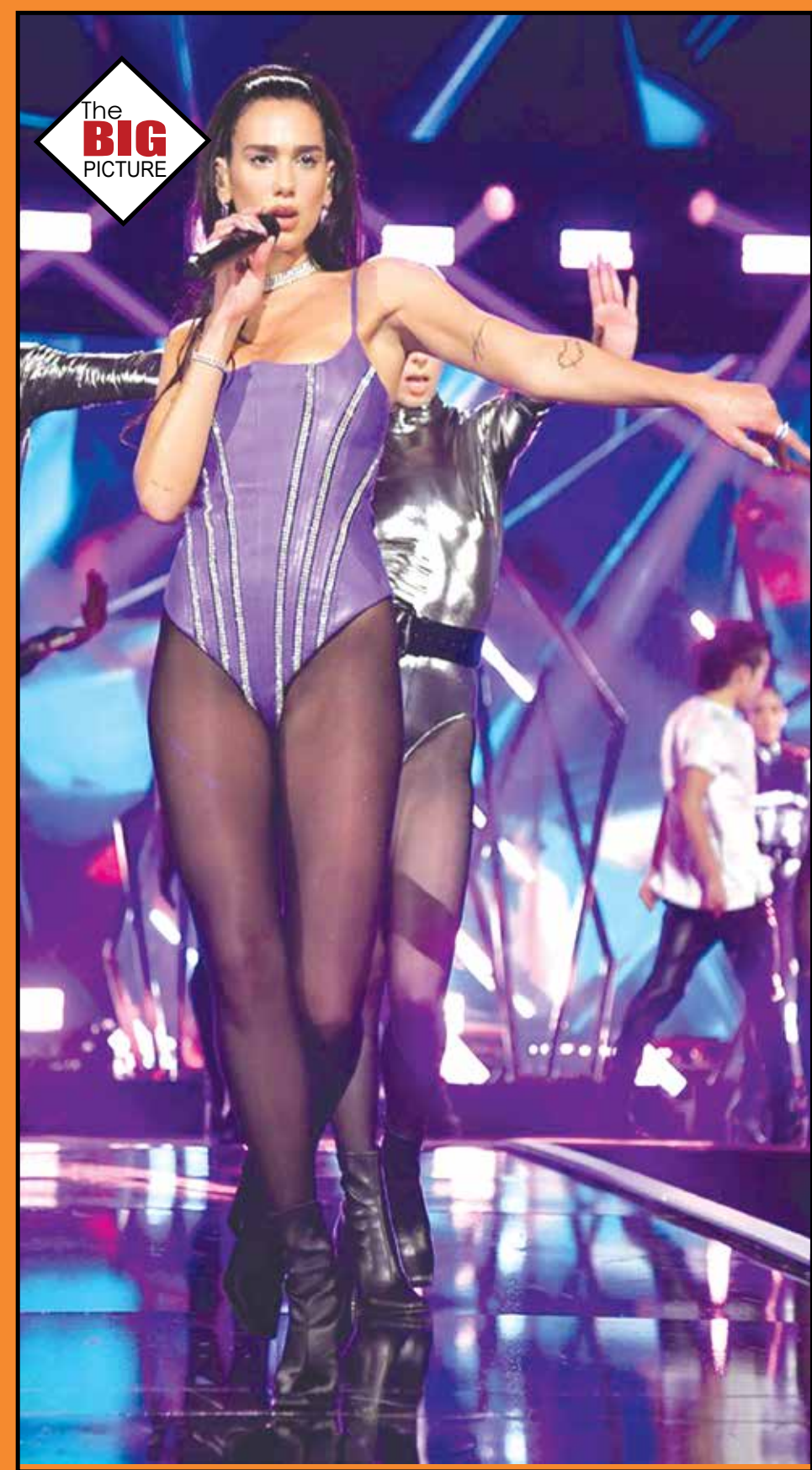
Directed by Shashi Kiran Tikka, the film stars Adivi Sesh in the lead role along with Sobhita Dhulipala, Saiee Manjrekar, Prakash Raj and Revathi.

Produced by Sony Pictures Films India, Mahesh Babu's GMB Entertainment and A+S Movies, the bilingual film has been shot simultaneously in Telugu and Hindi and will also be released in Malayalam.

Sony Pictures' Hollywood offerings include one of the most anticipated films of the year, "Spider-Man: No Way Home".

The film is directed by Jon Watts and stars Tom Holland, Zendaya, Benedict Cumberbatch and will release worldwide on December 17, 2021.

The studio will also release "Venom 2- Let There Be Carnage", the second offering from the franchise. With the film, Tom Hardy returns to the big screen as the lethal protector Venom, one of Marvel's greatest and most complex characters, the statement read.



LEVITATING! The singer, Dua Lipa performs at the iHeartRadio Music Festival in Las Vegas.

RuPaul creates history for most wins by person of colour at Emmys

LOS ANGELES, SEP 20 (PTI): Celebrated TV personality RuPaul has become the most awarded person of colour in the history of the Primetime Emmy Awards after his show "Drag Race" won a trophy for outstanding competition program at the 73rd edition of premier television awards.

This is the fourth consecutive win for the show, which RuPaul also created, hosts and executive produces, in the category. "Nailed It!", "The Amazing Race", "The Voice" and "Top Chef" were also among the nominees.

RuPaul Andre Charles, known mononymously as RuPaul, was tied with industry veteran Donald A Morgan's record, who had 10 Emmy trophies from 19 nods across categories during last Sunday's Creative Arts Emmy Awards. He now has 11 Emmy



wins to his credit.

For "RuPaul's Drag Race", he also won the Emmy in the outstanding host for a reality or competition program.

In his acceptance speech, the host-creator dedicated the award to the audience of the show. "Really thanks to all

of our lovely children on our show from around the world. You know, they are so gracious to tell their stories of courage and how to navigate this difficult life (that was more difficult this year). This is for you and for you kids out there watching. Come to Mama Ru," he said.

pain with the light of awareness. Know that the Universe is supporting you in the process of transformation. What you need to be mindful of: projecting your shadows onto others. Learning to respond rather than react will save you from unnecessary drama, beautiful.

CANCER:

It's not our experiences that define our reality, but our perception of them. What you are experiencing right now is a time of inner illumination. A time of watching all that has passed through the lens of awareness. You understand that things were neither good nor bad. They simply were, and that each of these experiences helped you become the person you are today.

LEO:

There are things we do for love and then there are things we do for money. But, who says you cannot find a middle ground between the two? The full moon in Pisces is bringing forth all kinds of revelations *and* rendering you with the courage to follow your true path. So, stay in the energy of passion, Leo, as you release your attachment to

a specific outcome. "The how" and "the why" of the manifestation process is not something you're meant to worry about.

VIRGO:

You are a manifesting maven, Virgo, and you don't even know this yet. Today, you're being asked to transmute fears and remember how powerful you are. The forces are working with and through you, helping you create the life you desire and deserve. If you've been calling in for support on the work front, get ready to witness a magnificent shift in this area of your life too. The cards are speaking of a partner who matches your frequency and wants to co-create magic with you.

LIBRA:

Be careful of what you're putting out there, Libra. Every time you say 'Love doesn't work out for me', that's the story you give power to, and this story then keeps you stuck in a loop. The cards are urging you to change your mindset when it comes to affairs of the heart. The soulful connection you desire and deserve is being offered to you, right now and in this moment. It all comes down to how open you will choose to be.

SCORPIO:

At any point of time, we have two options: to operate from a space of fear or let love reign. Something tells you're about to confront your biggest fear and take a bold step in the direction of who and what you love. As such, the full moon in Pisces is activating the portal of blessings for you. With the presence of the wish fulfillment card, we know that something that you have been hoping and praying for is about to come true.

SAGITTARIUS:

If you're being weighed down by a sense of stagnation, it's time to shake things up. It's time to break old habits and commit to doing things differently. Yes, that means saying 'yes' to opportunities that feel out of your comfort zone too. For some of you the choice to travel or move for work may be on the cards too.

CAPRICORN:

The thing is, our soul knows. Our soul always knows where we feel a sense of home, and this full moon you are being shown the sacred ties that bind you with those you with

your tribe. Remember, it's not always about grand declarations of affection. The quiet strength and support you render is what will truly help your relationships thrive.

AQUARIUS:

There are people who calculate their wealth in terms of the digits in their bank, but you're not one of those people, Aquarius. You value quality over quantity and understand that love, abundance and joy are your true assets. Not to mention, the soul connections that bring joie de vivre to your life and inspire you to be the best version of yourself.

PISCES:

Dear Pisces, do you believe that you need to carry the weight of the world on your shoulders? Are you of the opinion that it is your job to fix another person? Here's the thing, beautiful: the only person you can work on is yourself. So, break free from the illusions. Replace the negative beliefs with a positive mindset. The more you practice non-attachment, the more balance and harmony you will find in your relationships.