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SummitTIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Cabinet approves creation of 184 new posts for regularization of Home Guards

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

The State Cabinet met on 31 July at Tashiling Secretariat and discussed and approved a string of proposals.

Among the decisions which should bring some cheer was the Cabinet's approvals of the proposal placed by the Department of Personnel for creation of 151 posts of Security Assistants and 33 posts of Office Attendants in Level 1 of the Pay Matrix for regularization of temporary Home Guards.

While on creation of new posts, the Cabinet also approved the creation of 16 additional posts in the Sikkim State Education Service (SSES) Cadre.

As per the proceedings of the Cabinet shared by the IPR Department, several other approvals were also granted by the Cabinet on Saturday.

AGRICULTURE DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction of Rs. 315.63 lakhs for implementation of Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) scheme during 2020- 21; Approval and

sanction of Rs 6307.14 lakhs for implementation of "Per Drop More Crop" (PDMC) under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND VETERINARY SERVICES DEPARTMENT: Provisional sanction of Rs. 1,34,23,336 on account of Milk Production Incentive @ Rs. 8/Liter of Milk to Dairy Farmers Under Organized; Ex- post facto approval and financial sanction of Rs. 29.45 Lakhs towards implementation of Central Plan Scheme on Integrated Sample Survey for Estimation of Production of Major Livestock Products for the year 2019-2020; Administrative approval and financial sanction of Rs. 24.20 lakhs for the implementation of Central Plan Scheme on Integrated Sample Survey for Estimation of Production of Major Livestock Products during the year 2021-2022.

BUILDING AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT: Approval and financial sanction of Rs. 48.65 lakhs only for relocation of State Institute of Capacity

Building (SICB) Karfector, to River View Resort at Karfector; Administrative approval to undertake the work "Construction of Nepali Sanskriti Sangrakshan Bhawan at Jorethang in South Sikkim" at an estimated cost of Rs. 3275.62 lakhs and financial sanction of Rs 200.00 lakhs.

COMMERCE AND INDUSTRIES DEPARTMENT: Administrative approval and financial sanction of Rs. 1,66,91,973 only for release of subsidy to 48 beneficiaries under the Skilled Youth Startup Scheme.

DEPARTMENT OF PERSONNEL: Approval for creation of 05 (five) posts of Front Office Coordinator under Sikkim State Legal Services Authority; Approval for return of land earlier proposed for acquisition for the Development of AATI Complex at Penlong Block, East Sikkim to the land owners.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction of 16 additional posts in the Sikkim State Education Service (SSES) Cadre; Financial sanction of Rs. 6,53,31,874 only for Procure-

ment of Textbooks, Exercise Books and School Uniforms to School Students for the Academic Session 2021; Approval and sanction of Rs 26,13,600 only for release of Examination Fees for UG students of Sikkim State Government Colleges affiliated to Sikkim University; Approval and sanction of Rs. 50.90 lakhs (Rupees Fifty Lakhs Ninety Thousand) only towards implementation of Padma Likhna Abhiyan (PLA) Scheme of Adult Education; Approval and sanction of Rs 650 Lakhs towards release of Grants - in - Aid to two Government Polytechnics ATTC, Bardang and CCCT, Chisopani for the current financial year.

FOREST AND ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT: Administrative approval and financial sanction of Rs. 7,40,00,000 for implementation of project Grassland Development and Grass Reserve for North and West Districts of Sikkim during the current financial year 2021-22; Post facto approval for grants - in aid of Rs. 114.40 lakhs to various Boards under

Forest and Environment Department utilized for the year 2020-21; Administrative approval and financial sanction of Rs. 95,44,000 only for implementation of Gol- GEF (Global Environment Facility) - UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) "Secure Himalaya Project" for the current financial year 2021-22; Post - facto approval and financial sanction of Rs. 49,90,768.00 (Rupees Forty Nine Lakh Ninety Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty Eight) only for purchase of Animal Feed for captive animals and supply of essential materials in Himalayan Zoological Park, Gangtok for the period 1st January, 2020 to 31st December, 2020.

HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction of Rs. 32.57 Crores as Grants - in Aid for implementation of National Health Mission (NHM) programme during 2020-21.

HORTICULTURE DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction of Rs. 2430.00 lakh for the year 2021-22

...turn Pg2

Covid claims one more even as Sikkim records daily recoveries at double the number of new cases



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Covid claimed one more life in the last 24 hours in Sikkim at STNM Hospital, taking the State's Covid toll to 346. Covid's second wave, which has now been in Sikkim for 102 days [since 22 April, 2021] has accounted for 210 deaths now. The first wave claimed 136 lives.

While every fatality is traumatic, Sikkim can perhaps draw some hope from the fact that the past 24 hours also gave Sikkim recoveries at more than two-times the number of new cases.

Against the 126 new cases reported in the State in the past 24 hours, there were 256 people who beat Covid, ended their isolation period and returned to their daily lives.

With this, the state's count of recovered cases has further improved to 22,937.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department at 8AM this morning, the 126 new cases were

detected in testing of 1,122 samples on Sunday giving the State a daily test positivity rate of 11%.

While 70 samples returned positive for COVID-19 in RT-PCR testing of 807 samples, 55 people tested positive in rapid antigen testing of 310 samples and one more case was reported in TruNat testing of five samples.

Out of these 126 new cases, 31 were registered in East District, 69 in West District, 23 in South District and 03 in North District.

Sikkim's tally of the confirmed cases of COVID-19 reported so far has now reached 26,880, of which 3,323 are currently active cases and only 115 of these are with symptoms severe enough to require hospitalization. The rest of the active cases are recovering under home or facility isolation.

There were 14 new admissions of Covid patients in different hospitals in the State and 11 are currently under treatment in ICUs at STNM Hospital and Central Referral Hospital.

Main accused in killing of former Katihar Mayor arrested in Siliguri

SILIGURI, 02 AUG (PTI):

The main accused in the murder case of former mayor of Bihar's Katihar was arrested from Siliguri in West Bengal, the police said on Monday.

Shivraj Paswan (45) was shot dead by motorcycle-borne attackers near Santoshi Mandir Chowk in Katihar on Thursday night when he was returning home from work. He was in the real estate business.

During investigation, it was found that the main accused, Saket Suvarn, was hiding in Siliguri in north Bengal, the police said.

In a joint operation with the Siliguri Metropolitan Police, the Katihar Police arrested Suvarn from a relative's house in the city's Milan Pally area on Sunday, they said.

There are several criminal cases against him, the police said.

He was produced at a court and taken to Bihar on transit remand, they said.

So far, six people have been arrested in connection with the murder of Paswan, they added.

Paswan was elected to the mayor's post unopposed in March after it fell vacant as his predecessor Vijay Singh won the assembly polls from the Barari constituency.

Paswan had held the post till the tenure of the board ended in June.

Fresh elections for urban local bodies have been deferred in view of the COVID-19 outbreak. The day-to-day affairs of the municipal corporation are now being run by an administrator.

Indrahang meets I&B Minister, apprises him of pending demands



SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Lok Sabha MP, Indra Hang Subba, today called on Minister for Information & Broadcasting and Youth Affairs & Sports, Anurag Singh Thakur, at his residence in New Delhi.

In an official communiqué, the Minister informs that he began his interaction by apprising the Minister about the "long pending demands for seat reservation in Sikkim Legislative Assembly for Limboo and Tamang scheduled tribes, inclusion of left out

communities in the list of Schedule Tribe and HH 17th Karmapa's visit to Sikkim".

The Minister responded very positively to these issues, the MP informs.

Mr Subba also informed the Minister about the "very limited functioning" of Gangtok Doordarshan Kendra because it is yet to be formally inaugurated.

"The asset created and technically commissioned in 2004 has not been put to optimum utilisation. Hon'ble PM's vision to make north-east region the growth en-

gine of new India wouldn't materialise unless such facilities related to mass communication are strengthened. I requested Hon'ble Minister to make immediate necessary intervention in strengthening Gangtok Doordarshan Kendra," the MP writes.

He also thanked the Minister for the approval of Khelo India State Centre of Excellence at Reshithang and requested the Minister for necessary funding to strengthen infrastructure in athletics and also made a special request for replacement of Synthetic Athletic Track at Reshithang.

CCCT FY students devise affordable earthquake-resilient features for SGAY constructions

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Five final year students of the Department of Civil Engineering at CCCT, Chisopani, have come up with affordable and easily-implementable features to home constructions under Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana [SGAY] which will make the houses earthquake-resistant.

Nisha Subba, Shreya Sharma, Susan Darjee, Ripa Bhutia and Roshmi Chettri undertook the task as part of their Final Year project is titled, "Detailed financial case study of presently constructed Sikkim Garib Awas Yojana (SGAY) with earthquake resistant features."

The all-female group presented addition of a few simple highly economical and easily accessible earthquake resistant features to increase the durability of SGAY homes manifold, informs Nawneet Chettri, Lecturer, CCCT, Chisopani, under whom the five carried out the project.

Should their additions be considered, the average cost of the houses would increase only by 10-15% [about Rs 80,000], the lecturer informs, but the benefits will clearly be manifold.

4 deptts get new secretaries

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Commissioner-cum-Secretary Yashoda Bhandari, upon completion of her deputiation with the Ministry of Home Affairs as Director Census, was today posted as the Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Horticulture Department.

Accordingly, MT Sherpa moved from Horticulture Department to take charge as Secretary, Urban Development Department, replacing Sarala Rai who was transferred and posted as Secretary, Land Revenue & Disaster Management Department.

The fourth transfer ordered by the Department of Personnel today was of Tshering Namgyal Bhutia who moves from Land Revenue & DM Department to take charge as Secretary, Excise Department. He will also be holding additional charge as Secretary, State Election Department.

Streets for People Challenge goes online for public consultations

SUMMIT REPORT

GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Streets for People Challenge, a deliberation on "small, low cost, temporary designs" to make Gangtok more walking-friendly, will be moving online over the weekend for a public consultation to arrive at a consensus on which options to green-flag implementation in Upper/ Lower MG Marg.

Progressive Learning Foundation is putting this public online consultation together in partnership with Smart City Gangtok as part of the Streets for People Challenge on 07 and 08 Aug [Saturday and Sunday] at 1pm.

The consultation will held on the Zoom app and will be the first of its kind for Sikkim. The medium will be a 50/50 mix of Nepali and English, the organisers inform.

Those wishing to participate can sign-up using WhatsApp [+91 62968 39866] and a Zoom link will be shared to join the online meeting.

Participants who have no experience with Zoom will be given an orientation and other support to ensure their com-



fort. During the session guests will be asked to offer perspectives on a small, low cost, temporary design to make Gangtok more walking friendly. Architects will then create designs based on this input and implement it in Upper/ Lower MG Marg. Feedback will be solicited at each stage of the project.

All residents of Gangtok have been invited to sign up for these interactive online sessions.

Links to join the sessions are also available on the Smart City Gangtok FB and Insta.

To Join, click: <https://linktr.ee/PublicOnlineConsultation>

This Public Online Consultation has been organized by

winners of the Streets for People Challenge - Studio Interweave and Team Hishey Bhutia - with assistance from the Progressive Learning Foundation. The Council for Democratic Civic Engagement (CDCE) is the Civic Engagement Partner for this initiative.

The Streets for People Challenge is an initiative of the Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India, to inspire cities to create walking-friendly streets through quick measures, in response to Covid-19. There were eleven (11) submissions for the two challenge sites. Winners were selected by a survey and jury. The MG Marg winners were Studio Interweave followed by Ashik Jain and Team Kunzang Choeki as runners up and 3rd place, respectively. The Arithang site winners were Team Hishey Bhutia and Studio Interweave as runners-up. The two first place winners are now collaborating on the design for MG Marg, beginning with a Public Online Consultation.



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Fresh lot of rapid information

Minister inspects SNT complex in Siliguri



SILIGURI, 02 AUG (IPR): Minister for Buildings and Housing and Transport Departments, Sanjit Kharel led the joint inspection of SNT complex at Siliguri today.

During the visit, the team also inspected SNT Guest House, which is under renovation.

The team was comprised of Secretary Transport Department, PN Sherpa, Secretary State Transport Authority, Karma Namgyal, DGM Transport, Bhupendra Chettri, Chief Engineer Buildings Department, YN Gautam and Chief Engineer Transport Department, Manish Pradhan.

Chief Secy checks on I-Day celebration preparedness

GANGTOK, 02 AUG (IPR): Chief Secretary SC Gupta convened a preparedness meeting for the celebration of Independence Day 2021 at the conference hall of Tashiling Secretariat today.

The meeting was attended by Director General of Police, SD Negi, along with Principal Secretaries and Heads of various line Departments.

During the meeting, discussions were held over the arrangements to be made for the upcoming State level Independence Day celebration, wherein various issues pertaining to the venue and the programme schedule for the day were discussed.

It was discussed that the celebration will be scaled down relatively considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The Chief Secretary assigned various works to all the concerned departments while urging them to complete all necessary arrangements in due time. He further directed all concerned to conduct the Independence Day activities without violating the Covid-19 norms and protocol as per the guidelines.



WB Forest Minister on Darj visit



SMRITA KHAWAS

DARJEELING, 02 AUG:

West Bengal's Forest Minister, Birbaha Hansda, is on a visit to Darjeeling and today visited the Padmaja Himalayan Zoological Park here and returned impressed. This was her first visit to the famed zoo.

The Minister informed later that she was in Darjeeling to take stock of ground realities about forest management because some major plans are afoot in this sector in West Bengal.

About the Padmaja Himalayan Zoological Park, she shared that additional projects will be considered for the zoo to make it more child-friendly and conducive to learning.

Taking “goodwill gesture” ahead, Assam drops case against Mizoram MP

NEW DELHI, 02 AUG [NDTV]: Underlining that Assam wants to keep the spirit of north east alive and taking forward the “goodwill gesture” by Mizoram, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma late on Sunday directed state police to withdraw FIR against Mizo National Front Rajya Sabha MP K Vanlalvena in connection with the July 26 border clashes that left six police personnel dead.

However, the Assam Chief Minister added that cases against the other police officers will be pursued.

“To take this goodwill gesture ahead, I have directed Assam Police to withdraw FIR against K Vanlalvena, Hon'ble MP, Rajya Sabha from Mizoram. However, cases against other accused police officers will be pursued (sic),” he added.

The development follows Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga's Sunday statement that the boundary dispute



with Assam will be resolved amicably through dialogue. The Mizoram Chief Minister held a telephonic discussion with Home Minister Amit Shah and his counterpart Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. He has appealed to the people of Mizoram to prevent any possible escalation of the situation.

The dropping of FIR against Mr Sarma was part of the move.

The centre has told

both the states that their officers and forces will not be allowed to carry arms while visiting the conflict zone along the border between Mizoram's Kolasib and Assam's Cachar districts.

The central government has also asked the two states to restore movement of emergency and essential supplies as part of the de-escalation plan, sources told NDTV.

“Our main focus is on keeping the spirit of

North-East alive,” Mr Sarma tweeted hours after the telephonic conversation on Sunday, insisting that border disputes can only be resolved through discussion.

Earlier, Assam had issued a travel advisory asking people from the state not to go to Mizoram as their safety cannot be guaranteed. It also said all vehicles entering the state from Mizoram will be checked for “illicit drugs”.

Responding to travel advisory, Mr Zoramthanga said north east India will always be one and said there will be no restrictions on non-residents of Mizoram traveling through the state's Kolasib district, which borders Assam's Cachar district.

Assam and Mizoram have been engaged in a delicate border stand-off after seven people, including six Assam Police personnel, were killed and scores injured in a gunfight between the police forces of the two states along the inter-state border on July 26.

The two states have been at odds over the boundary for decades, but Monday's clashes flared up over an alleged construction by Mizoram in the disputed 198-square-mile stretch on the inter-state border -- Lailapur under Dhalai of Cachar district in southern Assam and Vairengte in Kolasib district of northern Mizoram.

Centre rushes medical team after Maharashtra reports first ever Zika virus case

NEW DELHI, 02 AUG [NDTV]: The centre has sent a team of medical experts to Maharashtra to support the state and “recommend necessary public health interventions” after its first ever case of Zika virus infection.

The team - which includes a gynecologist from Delhi's Lady Hardinge Medical College, and an entomologist from the city's National Institute of Malaria Research - will monitor the virus situation in the state and assess whether the Union Health Ministry's 'Action Plan for Zika Management' is being implemented.

On Sunday, Maharashtra - which was, until

recently, the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic in India - reported its first ever Zika virus case. The patient - a 50-year-old woman patient from the Purandar area in Pune district - also tested positive for Chikungunya.

The health department said she had recovered from her infection.

The department said several cases of fever had been reported from a village in Purandar early last month. Three of the samples sent to Pune for testing were positive for chikungunya.

Further tests were conducted on residents of that village and those in the area, revealing 25 cases of chikungunya,

three of dengue and the one Zika virus infection.

A quick response team from the Maharashtra health department visited the area on Saturday and spoke to local residents about the precautions they must take.

Prior to this, only Kerala had reported Zika virus cases this year; the state has 63 cases so far.

The Zika virus is spread by the Aedes mosquito, which also carries dengue and chikungunya.

Some common symptoms are fever, body aches, rash, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, and malaise or headache. Symptoms generally last between two and seven days, although most

of those infected do not develop symptoms, the World Health Organization (WHO) has warned.

As the number of Zika virus cases creeps up, medical experts have expressed “grave concern” - a concern compounded by the fact Maharashtra and Kerala are also badly affected by the coronavirus.

Dr Naresh Gupta, the Director of Delhi's Maulana Azad Medical College told news agency ANI the Zika virus, like the coronavirus, may also have (as yet) unknown variants, and urged authorities to increase testing to identify and isolate infections as soon as possible.

“Zika is a virus of

Cabinet approves creation of 184 new posts..

for implementation of programmes under Horticulture Mission for Northeast and Himalayan States (HMNEH) and approval to transfer Central Share of Rs. 2187.00 Lakh and State Share of Rs. 243.00 Lakh to the account of Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)- Sikkim as and when funds are released by the Government of India; En-bloc approval for implementation of centrally sponsored scheme - National Bamboo Mission at a total outlay of Rs. 425.00 lakh only for the financial year 2021-22.

LAND REVENUE AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT: Approval for registration of Sale Deed Document executed in terms of Notification No. 2/ LD/2019 dated 05/03/2019 by Shri Shyam Bahadur Limboo, son of Late Bom Bahadur Limboo, resident of Hee, West Sikkim in favour of Say Saylung Kanchanjunga Sewa Samaj of Hee, West Sikkim; Approval for registration of gift deed document executed by Shri Changay Lepcha of Pachak, East Sikkim in favour of Tara Education Society Managing Committee of Pachak in respect of land at Pachak Revenue Block, East Sikkim.

PUBLIC HEALTH ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT: Administrative approval for upgradation and rehabilitation of sewer network in Zone I, Gangtok at an estimated cost of Rs. 10445.41 lakhs and financial sanction of Rs. 3100 lakhs only.

ROADS AND BRIDGES DEPARTMENT: Post - facto administrative approval and financial sanction of Rs. 53.45 lakhs only for immediate pavement restoration of Khamdong - Lingzey - Tintek (KLT); Administrative approval for revised cost estimate of “Construction of motorable road from Salangdang to Ramam River connecting Lodhama (West Bengal) in West Sikkim” amounting to Rs. 2067.69 lakh (Rupees Twenty Crore, Sixty Seven Lakh and Sixty Nine Thousand only) and additional financial sanction of Rs. 280.20 (Rupees Two Crore, Eighty Lakh and Twenty Thousand only); Post - facto administrative approval and financial sanction of Rs. 51.00 lakh (Rupees Fifty One Lakh) only for “Restoration of sunken road formation along Khamdong - Lingzey Tintek (KLT) road under Tumin - Lingee constituency in East Sikkim”.

RURAL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction of Rs. 474.75 lakhs (Central Share) and Rs. 52.74 lakhs (State Share) for 2020- 21 under Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA); Administrative approval and financial sanction for transfer of Rs. 3100.00 lakhs (Rupees Thirty One Crores only) to Rural Local Bodies recommended by 15th Finance Commission for the financial year 2021-22; Approval and enbloc sanction of Rs. 3561.41 lakh (Rupees Thirty Five Crore Sixty One Lakh Forty One Thousand) for activities under MGNREGA in the year 2021-22; Approval and sanction of Rs. 100.65 Lakhs (Rupees One Crore Sixty Five Thousand) only towards State Share to Sikkim Rural Livelihood Mission for Implementation of National Rural Livelihood Mission.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT: Approval and enbloc sanction of Rs. 1,25,87,070.00 (Rupees One Crore Twenty Five Lakhs Eighty Seven Thousand Seventy) only for establishing/ strengthening the State Climate Change Centre/ Cell under NMSHE in the State of Sikkim (Phase- II).

SKILL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT: Approval for construction of Industrial Training Institute (ITI) at Aritar, Rhenock, East Sikkim at a total Project Cost of Rs. 950 Lakhs and financial sanction of Rs. 321.67 lakhs.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND WELFARE DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction of Rs. 489.57 lakhs for implementation of Child Protection Scheme; Approval and financial sanction of Rs. 110.00 Lakhs to be released to Sikkim Commission for Backward Classes (SCBC) for the year 2021-22 as Grant - in - Aid; Administrative approval of the project sanctioned under Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PM-JVK) amounting to Rs. 1398.80 lakhs and financial sanction of Rs. 4,19,64,000/- only.

TOURISM AND CIVIL AVIATION DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction for release of Rs. 2,00,00,000/- (Rupees Two Crores) only as Grant - in - Aid to Institute of Hotel Management (IHM), Sajong, Rumtek.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT: Post facto approval and sanction of Rs. 81.44 lakhs as Grant - in - aid to Singtam Nagar Panchayat, Gyalshing Nagar Panchayat and Mangan Nagar Panchayat; Approval and sanction of Rs 32 lakhs for Administrative and Office Expenditure under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) for the Financial Year 2020-21.

WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT: Financial sanction of Rs. 15.00 Crore only for implementation of various Mini Jhora Training Works; Approval and financial sanction of Rs. 10.00 Crores for implementation of Jhora Training Work (New)/ Storm Water Drainage/ Anti Erosion Work/ CWD/ Protective Work and Minor Irrigation Channels.

FOREST AND ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT: Approval and sanction of Rs. 96.29 lakhs for State Forest Development Agency (SFDA) for implementation of programmes under National Afforestation Programme (NAP) in the year 2021-22.



What is Novel Coronavirus - nCoV?

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

Symptoms of nCoV	Precautions to Prevent nCoV
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fever ● Difficulty in breathing ● Dry Cough ● Severe acute respiratory syndrome ● Pneumonia - like symptoms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash your hands often with soap. ● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer ● Observe good personal hygiene. ● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands. ● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms. ● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats. ● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places. ● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.
<p>Treatment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition. ● No vaccinations available as of now. ● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected. 	<p>If you seek help, you may call :</p> <p>-Toll free no. 104</p> <p>District surveillance Officer</p> <p>EAST : 7028372100</p> <p>WEST : 9583297809</p> <p>NORTH : 9641957468</p> <p>SOUTH : 7407691463</p> <p>New STNM</p> <p>AMS : 9434711402</p>

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE

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Energy-efficient water pumps distributed in IBM-Rangpo

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Power Department, the state designated agency, distributed 15 water pumps to 115 beneficiaries at IBM premises, Rangpo, on 31 July, a press release informs.

The distribution was officiated by Speaker LB Das, who is also the area MLA, at a function also attended by Rangpo councillors and officials from Rangpo Nagar Panchayat.

Though this program was to be undertaken in 2019-20, it could not be executed due to the pandemic, the release informs.

The Bureau of Energy



Efficiency, Ministry of Power, had formulated a demonstration project for replacement of "inefficient" water pumps with energy-ef-

ficient pumps and the Power Department surveyed the IBM area at Rangpo and Jorethang in South Sikkim for the project, it is in-

formed.

An awareness program on energy conservation was also addressed by Superintending Engineer Pemba Lep-

cha, who is also the nodal officer for the project.

A similar distribution program will be held for Jorethang shortly, the release adds.

Ex-gratia handed over to teenaged victim of bear attack in Labing

PRITAM LAMA
YUKSAM, 02 AUG:

Ex-gratia payment of Rs 50,000 was handed over to 14-year-old Budha Raj Limboo of upper Labing village under Yuksam-Tashiding constituency today for injuries suffered by him in a bear attack recently.

Buddha Raj was injured in an encounter with a Himalayan Black Bear near his home while he was out collecting fodder.

Deputy speaker Sangay Lepcha, who is also the area MLA, visited the victim today accompanied by the KNP

Range Officer Tenzing W Bhutia and local panchayats.

The KNP Range Officer informs that forest field staff from Yuksam KNP division have also surveyed the area and confirmed that there was no bear threat in the area any more.



Governor joins e-RUPI launch



SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Governor Ganga Prasad participated in the online launch of e-RUPI by the Prime Minister this evening, a press release from Raj Bhawan informs.

e-RUPI is a cashless and contactless instrument for digi-

tal payment.

e-RUPI, a press release informs, acts as an e-voucher based on a QR code or SMS string delivered to mobile phones of beneficiaries. The one-time payment mechanism of e-RUPI will allow users to redeem the voucher without a card, digital pay-

ments app or internet banking access, at the service provider, the release details.

After attending launch programme, the Governor appealed to the people of Sikkim to avail benefits from the e-RUPI platform for safe and secured payment system.

Supreme Court to hear plea challenging Rakesh Asthana as Delhi top cop

NEW DELHI, 02 AUG [NDTV]: The Supreme Court will hear a petition challenging the appointment of Rakesh Asthana as the Delhi Police Commissioner. A two-member bench of Chief Justice NV Ramana and Justice Surya Kant is expected to hear this matter on Thursday.

The petition has been filed by a lawyer - ML Sharma - who has challenged the appointment as being in violation of a 2018 Supreme Court order that said the UPSC (Union Public Service Commission) should, as far as practical, consider only officials with two years of service left.

Mr Sharma has also asked the top court to initiate contempt proceedings against Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah and Home Ministry officials on this matter.

Ex-CBI officer Rakesh Asthana was last week appointed Delhi Police Commissioner despite being just three days from retirement. An order by the Union Home Ministry - to whom Delhi Police reports - said Mr

Asthana had been given a year's extension in service granted "in public interest".

Mr Asthana was also given a deputation - from the Gujarat cadre to the AGMUT (Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram-Union Territory) cadre from which Delhi Police chiefs are usually picked.

Two months ago he was believed eliminated from the list of candidates because he was about to retire. A panel headed by the Prime Minister was reportedly reminded of a Supreme Court decision that officers with six months left in service should not be considered for police chief posts.

Earlier Mr Asthana was also ruled out of the post of CBI Director for the same reason - that he was about to retire - making his appointment as Delhi top cop all the more controversial.

The Congress and Delhi's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) have protested the centre's move.

Last week the Delhi Assembly passed a resolution seeking a reversal of his appointment.

LOST

I Ms. Chumit Lepcha(Student), D/O. Cho Lepcha and Mrs. Chukit Lepcha, R/O. Lingdem, upper Dzongu, North Sikkim had lost my Class X CBSE Board Passed Marksheet, Govt. Of India bearing Roll No: 3152297. The document lost while travelling between Mangan Bazaar and Dzongu, North Sikkim. So, I need to obtain the same from CBSE Board.



SIKKIM STATE TEACHERS' RECRUITMENT BOARD (Constituted Vide Notification No. 933/HRDD, 2015) Upper Syari, Gangtok, East Sikkim

Memo No. 64/SSTRB/ADM

Date: 02.08.2021

Postponement of Date of Interview for the Post of Headmaster, Secondary School, and Pradhan Adhyapak & Pracharya, Sanskrit Pathshala

The SSTRB had announced vide Memo No. 63/SSTRB/ADM dated 26.07.2021 that Screening-cum-Interview for the selection to the post of Headmaster, Secondary School, and Pradhan Adhyapak & Pracharya, Sanskrit Pathshala under the Department of Education, to be held from August 06, 2021, Friday onwards in the premises of Sikkim State Teachers' Recruitment Board Office located at Teachers' Guest House, Upper Syari, Gangtok, East Sikkim.

This is to notify further that the date of Screening- cum- Interview for the selection to the post of Headmaster of Secondary school, Pracharya & Pradhan Adhyapak of Sanskrit Pathshala, has now been postponed. New dates shall be rescheduled and communicated in due course of time.

For any assistance, please contact:
Mr MK Pradhan, Exams Officer, SSTRB
+917872861250
+919832043025
email: sstrb2019@gmail.com

Sd/-
(Secretary)

Sikkim State Teachers' Recruitment Board

R.O. NO. 129/IPR/Pub/Classi/21-22
Date. 02.08.2021

Manoj runs in 10th at Federation Cup U-20 Athletic Championship

SUMMIT REPORT
GANGTOK, 02 AUG:

Sikkim Amateur Athletics Association [SAAA] congratulated Manoj Biswakarma on finishing tenth in 3,000 meters Under-20 race in the 19th Federation Cup U-20 Athletic Championship held from 31 July to 02 August in Patiala, Punjab.

In the race on Sunday, Manoj finished tenth among 22 runners representing their respective states. A two-member SAAA team - Ranjana Tamang and Manoj Biswa-

karma - represented Sikkim at the 19th Federation Cup U-20 Athletic Championship. They were accompanied by RB Subba as coach and manager. SAAA general secretary, Thupden Rapgyal, congratulated Manoj for his outstanding performance in the competition and informed that a selection committee constituted by Sikkim AAA had conducted time-trials at Khelgaon, Reshithang, to select Ranjana and Manoj for the event. He added that the state team was fully sponsored by the association for the championship.



SOCIAL JUSTICE & WELFARE DEPARTMENT CHILD PROTECTION SCHEME GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM

Walk-In-interview

No. 215/SJ&WD/CPS/2021

Dated: 30.07.2021.

NOTICE FOR FILLING UP VACANT POSITION(S) OF CHAIRPERSON / MEMBER(S) OF CHILD WELFARE COMMITTEE (CWC) AND JUVENILE JUSTICE BOARD (JJB).

Applications are invited from eligible local candidates for filling up the following posts for a period of three years under Child Protection Scheme in the Social Justice & Welfare Department, sponsored by the Ministry of Women & Child Development. The details of posts and eligibility criteria are as under:

Sl. No.	Name of the post	No. of post(s) District wise	Educational Qualifications	Sitting Allowance.
1	Chairperson, Child Welfare Committee (01 post)	North - 01	* Should have a minimum of 07 (seven) years of experience of working with children in the field of education, health, or welfare activities OR * Should be a practicing professional with a degree in Child psychology or Psychiatry of Social Work or Sociology or Human Development or in the field of Law OR * A retired judicial officer.	Rs. 1500/-per sitting.
2.	Member, Child Welfare Committee (11 posts)	East - 02 West - 03 North - 04 South - 02	* Should have a minimum of 07 (seven) years of experience of working with children in the field of education, health, or welfare activities OR * Should be a practicing professional with a degree in Child psychology or Psychiatry of Social Work or Sociology or Human Development or in the field of Law OR * A retired judicial officer.	Rs. 1500/-per sitting
3	Member, Juvenile Justice Board (07 posts)	East - 02 West - 02 North - 02 South - 01	* Should have a minimum of 07 (seven) years of experience of working with children in the field of education, health, or welfare activities OR * Should be a practicing professional with a degree in Child psychology or Psychiatry or Sociology or in the field of Law	

TERMS AND CONDITIONS:

- These posts does not carry any pay scale or salary.
- The tenure of the posts is for a period of 03 years.
- The appointment shall not confer any right for regularization in future.
- The Members shall be selected through walk-in-interview of the eligible applicants.
- Only candidates fulfilling the above eligibility criteria as prescribed against each post shall apply.
- Candidates must be in good health and physically fit to discharge his/her duties.
- Applicants for the post of Chairperson and Member of CWC should be above the age of 27 (twenty seven) years at the time of submission of application or on the last date of submission of application.
- Applicants for the post of Member of JJB should not be less than 27 (twenty seven) years of age at the time of submission of application or on the last date of submission of application.
- Preference will be given to retired Government Officers having the required qualification(s).
- Selected candidates are liable to be posted in any district.
- As prescribed by the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Act, 2015/ rules, The CWC/JJB Members are required to sit on all working days unless the case pendency is less. Furthermore, CWC Members are required to hold at least 20 sittings in a month.
- No member shall be selected if he/she;
 - Is associated with any Child Care Institution, directly or indirectly, during his tenure as a member of the Board or Committee or have any other conflict of interest.
 - Has been involved in any immoral act or in act of child abuse. NOC from concerned thana required.

Application along with resume addressed to the Special Secretary-cum-Director, CPS, SJ&WD, with the following valid documents, email id and contact numbers must be submitted to the office of the Deputy Secretary, CPS, Social Justice & welfare Department, Lumsey, East Sikkim on or before 25/08/2021 latest by 4 p.m. Only those applications with prescribed and properly attested documents received within the stipulated date and time shall be entertained.

DOCUMENTS TO BE SUBMITTED:

- Attested Copy of requisite qualification from a recognized Board/University.
 - Attested copy of Sikkim Subject Certificate/Certificate of Identification from the Concerned Authority.
 - Attested copy of valid Local Employment Card.
 - No Objection Certification from the Secretary, Head of Department in case of employees serving in Government Departments.
 - Experience Certification duly certified by the relevant issuing Authority.
- Social Justice & Welfare Department reserves the right to reject any application not found fulfilling the above terms and conditions. No TA/DA shall be admissible for attending the interview.
- Date of interview will be intimated later on.
- This notice is also available in the departmental website www.sikkimsocialwelfare.gov.in and Sikkim Government website www.sikkim.gov.in.

Sd/-

Tshewang Gyachho, SCS,

Secretary

R.O. No.:127/IPR/PUB/Classi/21-22
Date: -02.08.2021

Social Justice & Welfare Department

Tendong Lho Rum Faat

Everyone should thank Mount Tendong

The coming Sunday is Tendong Lho Rum Faat, a festival unique to Sikkim, and which, even though exclusive to the Lepchas, is a propitiation which should find observance among more communities and across wider areas. While a “big” event will not be possible this year because of the pandemic, at an emotional level, a deeper affiliation should be invoked. Given the hyper-nationalism that is being screamed from every available platform at present, here is one engagement which can be more celebratory and even inclusive in contrast to the instinctive insularity which seems to have thickened the air.

The Lepchas were hunter-gatherers until modernity forced itself on them and development required them to settle down, and it is on occasions like Tendong Lho Rum Faat, or any other Lepcha festival for that matter, that we realize the connection with nature that people of the region have lost.

Every Lepcha ritual is rooted to the land of Sikkim and the neighbouring hills. Some rituals are located in scared spaces and even to stories exclusive to individual families, but some celebrations like Tendong Lho Rum Faat paint a much wider canvas of myths and touch the entire community. In the end, whether a localized observance or a “state-wide” celebration, every such festival is located in this space and directly linked to landscapes and landmarks here, locations they can visit and marvels of nature they can see for themselves. Such a close awareness of the land and its special elements most probably ensured that the community displayed instinctive conservation and intuitive protection of nature. After all, if the Lepchas of the land thanked Mount Tendong every monsoon for having saved them from drowning in the great deluge, it is only expected that for the remainder of the year, they treaded with care in its shadow, mindful of the need to keep the environs in robust health so that the mountain could rise in their protection in future as well if such a need arose again.

Such sentiments are strongest in situations when there is a direct connection between the land and its people – like in the case of a hunter-gatherer community. No one lives that life any more, hence the need to force closer connections through wider celebrations. If more communities were drawn into celebrating Tendong Lho Rum Faat, not only would this festival of the vanishing tribe grow grander, even other people now living on Lepcha Land will emerge more sensitive to the environment they inhabit because attracting their veneration will be a physical entity they can all see instead of the esoteric powers which otherwise command their faith. This is not to challenge anyone’s faith, but a suggestion that if more festivals of the indigenous people were made more secular, conservation concepts will become much more comprehensible and forceful.

What should also be considered is not only inclusion of such indigenous festivals into the curriculum of schools here, but also school excursions to places like Tendong. Almost everyone in Sikkim knows why the Lepchas thank Mount Tendong every year, but it will not come as a surprise if even many Lepcha children cannot point out the mountain for you. And therein lies one of the biggest challenges facing every effort at conservation – a disconnect because of which people have lost the perspective on nature. Even rooted-in-the-land festivals like Tendong Lho Rum Faat have become detached rituals for most people; to the extent that some might even think it to be a mythical summit even though the mountain can be spied from just about every high ridge in Sikkim! Take children to the mountain, have them hike around it sacred groves, teach them to “leave behind only footprints”, and within a few academic years, a generation will be at hand aware of the special place nature enjoys in their traditional knowledge base. Once they make this introduction, they will discover more places, respect more cultures and make more informed decisions about protecting the environment. Don’t make this connection for them, and they might become expert debaters at interschool competitions on climate change and global warming, but their Wikipedia-researched arguments will fail to even convince them. Take them to Tendong and have a Bongthing tell them the story of the grasshoppers or about why the cane of a particular grove make the best flutes, and they will notice when these insects and forests come under stress. And when that happens, they will also be moved to instinctively collaborate to protect. Is that not the kind of collaboration we want the young to be able to craft... for their own futures?

Don’t Be Fooled By Signs of Recovery – Pandemics Weaken the Flow Of Business Ideas For Seven Years

THANOS VEROUSIS
THECONVERSATION.COM

The UK continues on its path to economic recovery from COVID. According to the latest survey data from the Office for National Statistics, the proportion of companies seeing their turnover reduced by COVID in July 2021 was just 29%, compared to 65% in June 2020. That’s the lowest level since these surveys started in the same month.

This is what you would expect with the lifting of COVID restrictions. We are seeing predictable winners and losers – international travel and high-street retail are still getting back on their feet, for example, while Amazon and other home delivery businesses roar on.

But this narrative is missing something important. For many businesses, recovery will depend on rather more than just restrictions being lifted. The ability of businesses to innovate after a pandemic can be hampered for years after – and no one seems to be talking about it.

PRODUCTIVITY AND REMOTE WORKING

As part of the COVID restrictions, people were told that everyone who can work from home must do so. One important question was how this has affected productivity, which is a standard determinant of GDP growth and wages. The UK’s productivity growth has been in decline for years, so anything that prevents it from getting worse would be worth pursuing.

Whether remote working would achieve this was debatable, however. Academic research published

years before the pandemic pointed to clear productivity gains when people work from home. But the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) published a paper in September 2020 indicating that the overall effects would be negative, and a Bank of England working paper from December agreed. If so, it’s bad news that many believe that remote working will never go away entirely.

So why would productivity be weakened by remote working? One key reason could be that productivity is affected by our ability to generate ideas. The more that businesses come up with new innovative ideas, the more a nation’s economy is able to produce.

Creativity in the workplace requires not only creative people, but group thinking. Research indicates that being in a social environment affects both the amount and frequency of our ideas. This can happen anywhere from a formal meeting to knocking around ideas over a sandwich to queuing next to a colleague in the local coffee shop. The fewer the opportunities for social interaction, the poorer the ideas that we come up with.

This goes to the heart of the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter’s notion of “creative destruction”. It explains how economies grow as a mostly evolutionary process, in which new ideas replace old ones. If you weaken the flow of ideas, you’ll get stagnation.

THE THREAT TO THE UK

It might be tempting to think that ideas are overrated, and that consumer demand determines

what new products come on the market. But it’s often the other way around.

For an eloquent explanation of this, take a look at the famous scene below from the Devil Wears Prada, where fashion mogul Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep) gives new assistant Andy Sachs (Anne Hathaway) a frosty lesson in how the clothing industry works. This is prompted by Sachs sniggering at the fuss being made over choosing between two belts that she thinks look very similar.

Priestly picks on her “lumpy blue sweater” by pointing out that it’s not just any shade of blue, but a cerulean blue that originally came from a collection of gowns by Oscar de la Renta. He was then copied by numerous other designers before it filtered down to the high street and sold as millions of items of clothing. The point is that ideas can be replicated by a large number of firms, effectively creating a multiplier effect in terms of economic growth.

Innovation is in fact the most important determinant of long-term economic growth. Countries that host more innovative firms tend to achieve better GDP numbers.

I recently co-published a paper into how innovation is affected by pandemics. By analysing the effect on patent applications within the world’s leading economies of previous pandemics like the Spanish, Hong and Asian flus, swine flu and encephalitis, we concluded that it takes approximately seven years for innovation to recover from a pandemic shock.

It takes an average of two to three years after the pandemic for the shock to be felt on the ideas pipeline, as companies enter the pandemic with an existing list of ideas under development. From there, it remains depressed for four or five years.

More research-intensive sectors are disproportionately affected. And if this is the effect of taking people out of the workforce and preventing them from interacting in the usual way, the prospect of remote working being semi-permanent this time could make the damage even worse.

Incidentally, this should be of particular concern to the UK. According to the WIPO Global Innovation Index, the UK is currently fourth in the world in “innovation output”, meaning the extent to which ideas are turned into sales.

The lifting of the restrictions is a great opportunity to get the “ideas economy” moving again. The UK and other governments would be well advised to give extra assistance to firms that are particularly important to R&D, being mindful of the timescale over which this threat plays out. They should also invest to make patent offices as efficient as possible, and to set up more spaces that are purely designed for people to come together to develop ideas.

What governments must not do is to look at the latest promising recovery numbers and think that everything is getting back to normal – they need the bird’s eye view not the worm’s eye view. The UK is facing a slump in the creation of ideas that will slow down economic growth, and be made worse by remote working. Getting it right is a marathon, not a sprint, and it needs to be an urgent priority.

[the writer is Reader in Finance, University of Essex]

Fasting may have become a health fad, but religious communities have been doing it for millennia

IQBAL AKHTAR
THECONVERSATION.COM

The practice of fasting has entered popular culture in recent years as a way to lose extra pounds. Featured in the bestselling book “The Fast Diet,” it advocates eating normally on select days of the week while drastically reducing calories on the remaining days.

Fasting has been shown to improve metabolism, prevent or slow disease and possibly increase life span.

But the practice is far from new. Around the world the pious have been fasting for millennia. As a scholar of religion, I argue that there is much to be learned from religious fasting, an embodied practice, meaning that it connects the body and soul.

FASTING IN ISLAM AND JAINISM

Fasting is intrinsic to the two traditions that I study – Islam and Jainism. Jainism is an ancient religion from India that espouses, among other things, nonviolence, nonpossessiveness and pluralism.

In Islam, fasting is one of the five pillars that constitute the main belief and actions of a practicing Muslim. As part of this practice, Muslims abstain from food, water, smoking, sex and all sensory pleasures from dawn to dusk during Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. This is a divine commandment in the Quran and exemplified in the life of the Prophet Muhammad.

At its core, fasting is about conquering human pride to connect with God. Indeed, the term Islam itself means submission to God in Arabic. Muslims believe that fasting develops submission to God, empathy with the poor and repentance and gives time for spiritual introspection. According to the 12th-century theologian al-Ghazali, fasting can allow the believer to better perceive the ultimate reality of God as it involves all five senses – touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste.

The Jain tradition provides a different perspective on fasting from the one in Islam. Fasting falls under tapas or asceticism, which also varies by degree between the laity and monastics.

Jain fasting includes complete avoidance of food or eating only a partial meal, eliminating rare or expensive foods and avoiding sexual temptations. The holiday of Paryushan, observed annually around August to September, is the time when Jains connect communally on



the core tenets of the faith through fasting and studying.

For eight to 10 days, Jains focus on the values of forgiveness, humility, straightforwardness, truth, contentment, self-restraint, penance, renunciation, nonattachment and celibacy. Fasting is also possible throughout the year by individuals, but this celebration is the common communal embracing of fasting across sects.

FASTING AS FAITH

Religious fasting is meant to shock the body from its routines. The individual physically enters sacred time. According to the 20th-century Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade, sacred time lies outside of ordinary time and fasting is one way to step into it. During this time, normal activities are disrupted, so an individual’s thoughts become more attuned to the metaphysical. The physical needs and desires give way to spiritual reflection and contemplation on the world to come.

In most religions, fasting is associated with an introspection of one’s life – the past, present and future. This reflection can make one more conscious of one’s own actions internally and externally, the impact on oneself and on society.

Traditionally, fasting is coupled with prayer and meditation to further develop these goals. The annual cycles of fasting in most faith traditions are meant also to be cumulative over a life-

time; the hope is that each year, one’s character becomes a little better and wiser than the year before.

This refining of an individual’s characters over a lifetime is most easily visualized through the Chinese religious traditions, which include Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. The spiritual benefits of fasting are said to accrue over time, leading to a type of wisdom that the Confucians call ren, loosely translating as humanity, humaneness, goodness, benevolence or love.

Daoism also adds another dimension to the understanding of fasting in the Jain and Islamic traditions through the idea of “fasting of the heart-mind.” This means it’s not just the body that goes through the detoxing, but it also detoxes the soul, as people learn to control their five senses during fasting.

As religions show, fasting is much more than denying the body. Physical deprivation of food – up to a healthy point – can allow the mind to enter new states of awareness and understanding. By acknowledging this, secular fasters, I argue, can tap into its joy, uncover new ways of being and sustain this physical discipline over a lifetime as their religious brethren have for millennia.

[the writer is Associate Professor, Florida International University]

Expensive airfare puts additional burden on Nepali migrant workers

CHANDAN KUMAR MANDAL
KATHMANDU, 02 AUG [KATHMANDUPOST]: Aspiring migrant workers, who have been undergoing a series of hardships over the last few months, are being compelled to pay exorbitant prices for air tickets lately.

Overseas job seekers have been left with no option than to pay exorbitant airfares as labour migration has slowly restarted with the resumption of international flights.

Stakeholders say workers are being charged two to three times more than the regular airfares and this is affecting their jobs prospects.

"The Nepal government has said that it has allowed regular flights, but if we look at the airfares of those regular passenger flights, they are so expensive that migrant workers simply cannot afford them," said Sujit Kumar Shrestha, general secretary of Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies.

The government decided to resume limited international flights after Covid-19 cases started declining in mid-June. Regular commercial flights to major labour destinations were resumed also because there were reports of workers being made to pay for expensive chartered flights.

Shrestha said workers who were stuck at home due to the second wave of the Covid-19

pandemic-led restrictions have been paying between Rs60,000 to over Rs100,000 to fly to Persian Gulf countries.

"As per our estimates, there could be around 30,000 Nepalis who have completed all the procedures but are hesitant to fly as tickets are unreasonably expensive," said Shrestha.

Workers have started migrating after destination countries reopened their borders for outsiders.

Already, workers are under pressure to either get vaccinated or pay for an expensive quarantine stay, which can cost over Rs100,000, for going abroad to work. Now, expensive flight tickets have come as a new hurdle that is keeping them from flying to labour destination countries.

According to Ishwar Kafle, manager at Smile Travels, a Thamel-based travel and ticketing agency, an economy class Nepal Airlines ticket to Doha, Qatar costs more than Rs70,000 these days.

"Airfares cross Rs100,000 for Qatar Airways flights," said Kafle. "If one has to fly to Saudi Arabia by Himalaya Airlines, it can cost more than Rs150,000 as they have to also pay for quarantine services which has to be paid at the time of buying the air ticket."

Stakeholders say limited flights to labour destination countries have caused the air



rates to skyrocket, which has affected the migrant workers.

"As there are not enough regular commercial flights, ticket prices have gone up. One would buy an economy class ticket at Rs18,000-20,000 for Qatar during normal times. For Saudi Arabia, it would be around Rs30,000-35,000," said Kafle, the travel agency manager. "Expensive air tickets have added to the financial burden of Nepalis flying abroad for employment. The prices are high because there are not enough flights and this has hit our sales because not many people are buying tickets these days."

Currently, Qatar Airways operates two daily flights from Kathmandu to Doha,

whereas Nepal Airlines conducts five flights a week, as per their updated schedule for the month of August. Likewise, Himalaya Airlines, as per its latest schedule, operates four weekly flights from Kathmandu to Dammam of Saudi Arabia and two weekly flights on the Kathmandu-Doha route.

"The government says that regular flights have resumed for major destination countries. But there are not enough flights. Airline companies say that they are not given more flying slots," said Shrestha. "There should be more flights to facilitate migrant workers so that they get tickets at cheaper rates. Nepal Airlines is not operating flights to Saudi Arabia, a popular labour destination

country, whereas a private company is operating chartered flights. Why can't the Nepal Airlines do that? Is it because the government wants to promote a certain private airline company?"

The Nepal Association of Foreign Employment Agencies has been drawing attention of the agencies concerned to investigate the inflated airfares, which they have blamed on the "airline cartel", and operate more flights.

"We have issued a warning that if more regular flights are not added, we will come out strongly against the government, because the current flight situation has affected both workers and recruiting agencies," said Shrestha.

Nepal's sugarcane farmers resort to agitation again after government breaks promise

KRISHANA PRASAIN
KATHMANDU, 02 AUG [KATHMANDUPOST]: Weeks after Sher Bahadur Deuba took the helm of the government, sugarcane farmers have resorted to agitation for payment of their remaining dues, seven months after the then KP Sharma Oli administration had struck a deal committing farmers to clear their arrears.

Last winter, hopeful sugarcane farmers returned home after weeks of protest in Kathmandu following an agreement with the government.

The Industry Ministry had on December 28, 2020, assured farmers that it would make sugar mills liable to pay their dues pending for the last 4-5 years. As per the agreement, sugarcane producers would get all their outstanding dues within 21 days of the agreement.

Now farmers are back in Kathmandu to exert pressure on the Sher Bahadur Deuba led coalition government.

"The farmers are back in Kathmandu for the third time after the government broke its promise," Rakesh Mishra, patron of the Sugarcane Farmers Struggle Committee, told the Post.

According to him, as per the government's claim, sugar mills owe Rs155 million to farmers out of a staggering Rs650 million after piling dues for the last 4-5 years.

But farmers say that the mills still owe them Rs250 million which includes the subsidy amount given to them by the government which sugar mills have not paid.

Mishra said that as per the government's record, Annapurna Sugar Mill of Sarlahi still owes Rs80 million, followed by Rautahat-based Shree Ram Sugar Mill with Rs30 million, and Nawalpara-

si-based Lumbini Sugar Mill with Rs20 million.

Another Nawalparasi-based Indira Sugar Mill owes Rs20 million to farmers and Sarlahi-based Mahalaxmi Sugar Mill is yet to clear Rs5 million.

Urmila KC, deputy spokesperson of the Industry Ministry, said sugar mills have already deposited the remaining dues with the banks but as many farmers do not have bank accounts, it has not been transferred.

According to the Industry Ministry, the concerned District Administrative Offices have reported that sugar mills with remaining dues have deposited the amount with the banks, but as they don't have the farmers' contact numbers, it has not been transferred to their accounts.

The ministry had said earlier that since there was a dispute on the amount of remaining dues after farmers claimed mills have yet to pay them Rs250 million, it would be decided through a report prepared by a government formed committee.

The report was said to be published after 120 days of the agreement but there is no development so far, said Mishra.

The government subsidy includes Rs65.28 per quintal of sugarcane. This subsidy amounts to 90 percent of the value-added tax levied on the sugar sales at current prices by sugar mills. As per the provision, the government refunds 90 percent of the value-added tax levied on the sugar sales to mills which they pay to sugarcane farmers.

Narayan Prasad Regmi, spokesperson of the Industry Ministry, claimed that the draft copy of the committee's report has been provided to the farmers as well. "But they did not come for the discussions after they received the report."

Mamata Banerjee's nephew, on Mission Tripura, says car attacked

KOLKATA/AGARTALA, 02 AUG [NDTV]: Trinamool Congress National General Secretary Abhishek Banerjee's convoy was today attacked in Agartala by alleged BJP workers while he was in the city to launch Mission Tripura, aimed at gaining power in the northeastern state. Posting a video of the attack, Mr Banerjee tweeted: "Democracy in Tripura under @BJP4India rule! Well done @BjpBiplab for taking the state to new heights."

He was on his way to the Tripureshwari temple from the Agartala airport when the attack shown in the video took place.

Mr Banerjee's con-

voy was first stopped at Charilam in West Tripura district as protesting BJP workers raised slogans, trying to block the road, police sources told PTL. A group of BJP workers also tried to stop him at Kamalasagar in Sipahijala district, raising slogans against him, they said.

Speaking at a press conference later, the leader, nephew of West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, said the BJP can't stop the Trinamool.

"We will free the people of Tripura," he said, taking a dig at the Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb, "If Biplab babu can stop us, let him try."

"The kind of attack I faced from BJP goondas, then what are the people facing...In Tripura, it is 'criminals at your doorstep'," he said, playing on Mamata Banerjee's Government At Your Doorstep programme in West Bengal.

His party alleged that the BJP had also damaged flags and festoons of the West Bengal Chief Minister, besides those showing Mr Banerjee, which had been used to decorate Agartala to welcome him.

"Shocking display of absolute hooliganism by the @BJP4Tripura government! When it comes to BJP, ruthlessness and DISRESPECT FOR DE-

MOCRACY seems to be running the show. You can keep trying but you cannot erase us from the hearts of the people of #Tripura! Shameful attempt," the Trinamool state unit tweeted, according to PTL.

Mr Banerjee said his party had begun the organisational work in the state and that a "Ma, Mati, Manush" government will be formed in Tripura in 1.5 years. He was using one of his party's most evocative war cries that has been deployed effectively in the past to firm up support in West Bengal.

Today is effectively the relaunch of the Trinamool Congress in

Tripura. At a function in Agartala, former BJP state president and former Congress MLA, Subal Bhowmik, was among those who joined the party, ANI reported.

In 2018, just ahead of the Assembly elections, which the BJP swept, Mr Banerjee's party had at least six MLAs in the Assembly. The then rebel leader Mukul Roy, however, wooed them away to the BJP.

Mr Roy is now back in the Trinamool Congress and is believed to be trying to get them back.

At least seven Congress leaders in Tripura joined Trinamool last week when several senior leaders of Ms Banerjee's party landed in Agartala to protest the detention of poll strategist Prashant Kishor's IPAC team that had gone there to survey the political scene in Tripura.

Members of Charai tribe return to Tripura

AGARTALA, AUG 2 (PTI): Members of the Charai tribe, who had fled from Damcherra in North Tripura district to neighbouring Karimganj in Assam following a clash with displaced Brus from Mizoram have started returning home, an official said on Monday.

"At least 269 tribals who fled to neighbouring Assam returned last evening and are now sheltered in a school and provided with food and medical assistance... They would continue to stay in the school un-

til their houses are repaired", Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Panisagar, Rajat Pant told PTL.

Some more tribals are staying with their relatives in Assam and they have also agreed to come back after spending some time with their relatives, the SDM said.

Thirteen people were injured in a clash between Brus and local tribals near Casco Bru camp in North Tripura district on July 26, following which 640 Charais fled to Manikban hamlet in Patharkandi in Karimganj

district of Assam.

Panisagar MLA Binoy Bhushan Das accompanied by officials visited Manikban on Saturday to convince the Charais to return to their homes, North Tripura, Superintendent of Police, Bhanupada Chakraborty said.

He said that state and central paramilitary forces have been deployed in the area where the clash had taken place and the situation is completely peaceful.

Over 30,000 Brus, who have been living in Tripura since 1997, are

now permanently settled in the state and a tripartite agreement was signed to this effect on January 16, 2020.

The Brus have been living in relief camps in Tripura after they fled Mizoram in 1997 following ethnic clashes with Mizos.

Their rehabilitation process started earlier this year and many of them were settled in different parts of Tripura. The migrants have urged the state government to provide them security during the resettlement process

average of 1.30 per cent.

The COVID-19 recovery rate in the state has improved to 98.44 per cent, better than the national average of 97.40 per cent.

Altogether, 1,17,09,022 samples have been tested for COVID-19 in Jharkhand, including 47,907 since Sunday, it added.

Jharkhand reports 27 new COVID cases; one virus death

RANCHI, AUG 2 (PTI): Jharkhand reported 27 new COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, which pushed the tally to 3,47,200, a health department bulletin said on Monday.

The COVID-19 death toll rose to 5,129 in the state with one fresh fatality due to the contagion reported from Bokaro in the

last 24 hours, it said.

Of the 27 new cases, East Singhbhum reported six cases followed by five cases each from Bokaro and Sahebganj and two cases each from Chatra, Dumka and Ranchi.

No new COVID-19 case was reported from Dhanbad, Garhwa, Godda, Gumla, Hazaribag, Koderma, Latehar, Lohardaga,

Pakur, Palamu, Saraikela, Simdega and West Singhbhum districts.

Jharkhand now has 254 active COVID-19 cases, while 3,41,817 patients have recovered from the disease including 24 during the last 24 hours, the bulletin said.

The COVID-19 mortality rate in the state remained at 1.47 per cent, higher than the national

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Dutee finishes last in her 200m heat race, fails to qualify for semifinals at Olympics

TOKYO, AUG 2 (PTI): Sprinter Dutee Chand ran her season's best in 200m but that was not enough for a semifinals berth as she made a disappointing exit from the Olympics after finishing last in her heat race here on Monday.

The 25-year-old Dutee, who had also crashed out of her pet event 100m in the first round, clocked 23.85 seconds to finish seventh and last in Heat 4.

Top three finishers from each of the seven heats and the next three fastest qualify for the semifinals.

She finished 38th overall out of 41 competitors to end her second Olympic campaign on a disappointing note.

She has a personal best of 23 seconds, which she had clocked while winning a silver at the 2018 Asian Games.

The Odisha runner had come to Tokyo Olympics with modest ambitions of at least reaching the semifinals considering the gulf in the timings between the top performers and herself. But even that ambition eluded her.

She had qualified for the 200m on the basis of her world rankings, unable to breach the automatic entry standard of 22.80 seconds.

Christine Mboma of Namibia, who won Dutee's heat with a timing 22.11 seconds, topped the heats ahead of American Thomas Gabrielle (22.20), while the likes of Tokyo 100m gold winner Elaine Thompson-Herah (22.86) and silver medallist Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce (22.22) -- both Jamaicans -- made it to the semifinals at third and 16th respectively.

The biggest shock was that the 100m bronze medallist Shericka Jackson didn't make it through to the semifinals. The Jamaican tried to take it easy in her heat, but eased off too much before the finish and eventually crossed the line in fourth. Her 23.26 was not enough to advance to the semifinals.

On Friday, Dutee had failed to progress to the semifinals of the women's 100m event as well, finishing seventh in her heat and 45th overall with a timing of 11.54 seconds.

Dutee was nowhere near her best in the 100m heat race also as she ran well outside her national record of 11.17 seconds.

She had qualified for the Olympics on the basis of world rankings, unable to breach the automatic qualification mark of 11.15 seconds.

After the 100m heat race on Friday, Dutee had tweeted: "... I am sorry as I couldn't stand to all your expectations.

Viva Italia! Olympic golds follow soccer and song successes

TOKYO, AUG 2 (AP): The first hints that this was Italy's year came when Italian band Maneskin won the popular Eurovision Song Contest in May. Then came the European Championship soccer title run in June and July.

To top it all off, on the first day of August, Marcell Jacobs won the 100 meters at the Tokyo Olympics to succeed Usain Bolt as The World's Fastest Man.

And who was the first man to embrace Jacobs after he crossed the line in a personal-best 9.8 seconds on Sunday? That would be Gianmarco Tamberi, the Italian high jumper who had just won gold in his event in a tie with Mutaz Essa Barshim of Qatar.

Italian Olympic Committee president Giovanni Malag called it the greatest day in Italian sports history.

We've accomplished something epic and extraordinary just like the soccer success and it's uniting the country, Malag said.

We've had some epic victories, like winning the World Cup of soccer (four times), but in terms of the (Olympics), this is something that the grandchildren of our grandchildren will



read about in history books one day.

The successes have been a welcome respite for a country that spent much of the past 16 months in various stages of lockdown. Italy was the first country outside Asia to get hit by the COVID-19 pandemic and suffered immensely, particularly in the spring of 2020 when hospitals in northern Italy were overwhelmed with patients and the death toll soared. Italy has recorded more than 128,000 coronavirus deaths, the highest in the 27-nation European

Union.

Malag discussed the extraordinary lengths that he personally was involved in to make sure that athletes like Tamberi and Jacobs could continue training during the various lockdowns.

For an athletics team that didn't win a single medal at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, the pressure was on.

And now we've got The World's Fastest Man and the man who jumps the highest, Malag said.

Marcello and Jimbo have made all Italians proud. Words don't do them justice.

With still a week to go, Italy already has won a total of 26 medals at the Games across all sports, only two fewer than the Azzurri took home from Rio.

Jacobs was born in Texas to an American father and an Italian mother. The parents split when Jacobs was 6 months old and he moved to Italy and never got to know his dad. They reconnected about a year ago by phone, as the sprinter tried to learn about his roots.

Vivian Masini, Jacobs' mother, watched her son's race from her

home in the northern Italian town of Manerba del Garda.

I spoke to him between the heats and the semifinal, and before the final, Masini told Sky Italia.

He was having a massage to let out (the nerves) before the final. He wanted to have a laugh, and he told me, Mom, don't worry, I know what I'm doing.'

Marcell really is a very good guy, humble, even if sometimes he want to disguise this with his tattoos and his (wild) behavior, she added. But he's a very grounded person.

What a recovery! Hassan falls, gets up and wins 1,500 heat

TOKYO, AUG 2 (AP): Sifan Hassan's bid for a distance treble at the Olympics was nearly derailed Monday when the world champion tripped over another runner and fell at the final bell of her 1,500-meter heat.

Amazingly, she ended up winning the race.

Hassan tried, but failed, to hurdle over Kenya's Edinah Jebitok, who tumbled just in front of her as runners jostled for position at the start of the final lap.

Hassan also went crashing down but rolled, quickly got back to her feet and set about chasing down the pack in an astonishing comeback.

Staring at a shock elimination, the Dutch runner sped past a couple of runners down the back straight, had reached the leading pack by the last bend, and won from Australia's Jessica Hull and American Elinor Purrier St. Pierre after powering down the home straight.

Hassan finished in 4 minutes, 5.17 seconds to qualify for the semifinals, although she



nearly paid dearly for the decision to run at the back of the field in the early stages of the race and wait for the bell to make her move. She was third-from-last at the start of the final lap and just before she fell.

Her recovery kept alive her bid for the treble in Tokyo.

Hassan had already qualified to run in the 5,000-meter final later Monday at the Olympic

Stadium, although the energy she expended on that last-lap scramble in the 1,500 heats might catch up with her when she returns in the evening session to try for her first gold of the Games.

Hassan didn't stop to speak to reporters after the 1,500 race as she rushed away to recover and prepare for the 5,000 final.

Hassan, who was

born in Ethiopia but moved to the Netherlands as a refugee, is expected to battle with two-time world champion Hellen Obiri of Kenya for the 5,000 gold, while there are three Ethiopians also challenging for a medal.

Hassan won a 1,500-10,000-meter double at the world championships in Doha, Qatar in 2019. She has said she will also run in the 10,000 meters at

the Olympics. No athlete has won 1,500-, 5,000- and 10,000-meter golds at the same Olympics.

Hassan's grueling schedule means she will have to run six races in eight days in the Tokyo heat and humidity, including those two races on Monday and the 1,500 and 10,000 finals on back-to-back days on Friday and Saturday.

Tomar, Rajput fail to qualify for 50m Rifle 3P final; Indian shooters finish without medal



TOKYO, AUG 2 (PTI): Indian shooters Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Sanjeev Rajput failed to qualify for the finals of the men's 50m rifle 3 positions event at the Tokyo Olympics here on Monday.

Tomar finished 21st in the qualification while Rajput was placed in 32nd position at the Asaka Shooting Range as the Indian shooting team returned without a medal for the second straight time at the

Olympics.

Only the top 8 athletes qualify for the final.

Tomar shot a total of 1167 with 63 inner 10s in the qualification over the stages of kneeling, prone and standing, while Rajput, appearing in his third Olympics, aggregated 1157 with 55 inner 10s.

The cut was made at 1176.

With this, Indian shooters failed to win a medal for a second successive Olympics.

Australia's swimmers reflect on their golden journey in Tokyo



TOKYO, AUG 2 (AP): Emma McKeon and Ariarne Titmus were the undisputed queens of the pool at the Tokyo Olympics.

McKeon leaves Tokyo with four gold medals and became the first woman to earn seven medals in swimming at a single Games. She also tied the record for the most medals won by a woman at a single Games set by Soviet gymnast Maria Gorokhovskaya in 1952 in Helsinki.

McKeon also has eleven career medals, eclipsing the record of nine that was set by Ian Thorpe and Leisel Jones.

While McKeon said "It has't sunk in yet, but I guess over quarantine probably will", Titmus was still reflecting on her incredible gold in the 400m freestyle event.

Australia won nine golds, three silver and eight bronze in the swimming pool at Tokyo beating their own mark of eight golfs they won in Melbourne in 1956.

Israeli Cabinet advances budget, shores up new government

JERUSALEM (AP): Israel's Cabinet advanced a national budget on Monday for the first time since 2018 in a sign of stability for the country's fragile new government. The 120-member Knesset must still approve the two-year spending plan by November to avoid dissolving the government and new elections.

A failure to agree on a budget was one of the factors that led to the collapse of the previous government, led by Li-

kud's Benjamin Netanyahu. That resulted in new elections early this year that ultimately put Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in charge of an eight-party coalition spanning the political spectrum.

"Israel is returning to work," Bennett said after an all-night session. He said the 2021-2022 spending plan "reflects concern for all citizens of Israel and does not serve any narrow sectorial interest."

The Cabinet's approv-

al of the spending plan is another step toward avoiding new elections, though it is no guarantee.

The coalition government is delicately balanced, including far-right and far-left parties as well as an Arab party. With a narrow 61-seat majority in the 120-seat parliament, a host of issues, ranging from economic policies to dealing with the Palestinians, could threaten the fragile alliance at any time.

Under the agreement,



Bennett, a leader of Israel's settlement movement, would remain prime minister for two years while centrist Yair Lapid serves as foreign minister. Lapid would then ascend to the top post.

Bennett said the agreement is a sign that "this government would deal with the public and not itself." And in a nod to talks between now and the November deadline for passage, he added: "Good luck to us all."

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ElseWhere

Berlin protesters decry coronavirus measures; 600 detained

BERLIN, AUG 2 (AP): Thousands turned out in Berlin to protest the German government’s anti-coronavirus measures despite a ban on the gatherings, leading to clashes with police and the detention of some 600 protesters. Local authorities had banned several different protests this weekend, including one from the Stuttgart-based Querdenker movement, but protesters in Berlin defied the ban.

Berlin’s police department deployed more than 2,000 officers to try and disperse the protests on Sunday, but it said officers who sought to redirect protesters or disband larger groups were harassed and attacked.”

They tried to break through the police cordon and pull out our colleagues,” Berlin police said, adding that officers had to use irritants and batons.

As the crowds made their way from Berlin’s Charlottenburg neighbourhood through Tiergarten Park toward the Brandenburg Gate, police warned via loudspeaker that they would use water cannons if protesters did not disperse. By



Sunday evening, police had detained about 600 people, according to German media, and protesters were still marching through the city.

Germany eased many of its coronavirus restrictions in May, including reopening restaurants and bars. Still, many activities, such as dining indoors at restaurants or staying in a hotel, require proof that an individual is either fully vaccinated, has recovered from the virus or can show proof of a recent negative coronavirus test.

Although the number

of new coronavirus cases in Germany remains low compared with neighbouring countries, the delta variant has sparked an increase in new infections in the last few weeks. On Sunday, Germany reported 2,097 new cases, an increase of more than 500 over the previous Sunday.

The Querdenker movement, the most visible anti-lockdown movement in Germany, has drawn thousands to its demonstrations in Berlin, uniting a disparate mix on both the right and the left, including those opposing

vaccinations, coronavirus deniers, conspiracy theorists and right-wing extremists.

Earlier this year, Germany’s domestic intelligence service warned the movement was becoming increasingly radical and put some of its adherents under surveillance.

Wolfgang Schuble, president of Germany’s parliament, sharply criticized the Querdenker movement Sunday, encouraging people not to be fooled by cheap slogans.

If practically all experts worldwide say the

coronavirus is dangerous and vaccination helps, then who actually has the right to say, Actually, I’m smarter than that?” he told the Neue Osnabrcker Zeitung. To me, that is an almost unbearable level of arrogance.

The protests follow other demonstrations against coronavirus measures around Europe.

More than 200,000 people turned out Saturday in France to protest vaccination requirements for the third straight weekend, at times clashing with police. Some 80,000 others protested in cities across Italy last weekend.

Mexico’s referendum on trying ex-presidents falls short

MEXICO CITY, AUG 2 (AP): A referendum in Mexico on Sunday cost the country about 25 million, but drew only a fraction of the voters needed to make it binding. Few people liked the poorly written question on the ballot, and the vote was held in a third wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

The nationwide referendum asked whether ex-officials should be tried for any illegal acts. The National Electoral Institute reported that while over 90% of those who participated voted yes, only about 7% of eligible voters turned out, well below the 40% threshold needed.

Critics noted that Mexico has no formal amnesty for former leaders, and there is nothing in current law saying they can’t be brought to justice. As opponents say in a slogan, The law must be applied, not put up for a vote.

Turnout at some Mexico City polling places appeared light Sunday.

Jose Francisco Espinosa Cortes, 60, who drives a taxi and runs a computer repair business, was one of only about 60 people to have voted by mid-morning at a polling station in the middle-class San Rafael neighbourhood.

A lot of people have fallen for the propaganda of ‘why go out and vote, nothing is going to change,” said Espinosa Cortes. But if we don’t end impunity, we’ll never end corruption,” he said calling the referendum a historic chance for Mexico to get justice.

There should be a line of people out to here,” he said, gesturing to the empty sidewalk in front of the polling place.

Photographer Santiago Ruiseor, 43, preferred



to take his daughter to a Mexico City park to play Sunday rather than vote. This is a farce, Ruisenor said. This is pure cynicism, an act that is only being used to increase the president’s popularity.”

To comprehend the exercise, one has to understand President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who pushed for the referendum. A populist, he likes large crowds, and the pandemic has prevented him from holding the kind of mass rallies of hundreds of thousands of people he used to have regularly in Mexico City’s main plaza when he was a candidate.

He needed 40% of registered voters to cast ballots about 37 million people for the referendum to be binding. Still, drawing nearly 7 million was no mean feat in the face of the pandemic.

The people want participative democracy, not just representative democracy, Lopez Obrador said last week. You have to have faith in the people, you have to have confidence in the people and their free choice, not be afraid of the people.

Jose Antonio Crespo, a political analyst at Mexico’s Centre for Economic Research and Training, called the referendum

strictly an exercise in politics and media exposure, noting the outcome of the ballot question was never in doubt.

The question isn’t whether the yes option will win, we know that 90% or more will vote yes, said Crespo. The question is, how many people will go out to vote? A lot of us don’t want to be used in a manipulation. It will be an indicator of how many people still support Lopez Obrador, of how much capacity he has to mobilize people.

After two unsuccessful runs for the presidency which he says he was cheated out of Lopez Obrador won on the third try in 2018, promising revenge is not my strong suit and forging a cordial transition with former president Enrique Pena Nieto.

Crespo, like many Mexicans, believes Lopez Obrador struck a non-aggression pact with Pena Nieto, agreeing not to go after him in return for promises of a clean presidential race in 2018.

But the whole thing, while perhaps necessary, left Lopez Obrador short on his main promise, to eradicate corruption; three years into his term he has few high-profile convictions to show for

it. The corruption allegations made by the former head of the country’s state-owned oil company against Pena Nieto and top officials of the previous administration have proved hard to bring to trial.

So Lopez Obrador is seeking the blessing of the public to change course and go after ex-presidents, two of whom Felipe Calderon (2006-2012) and Vicente Fox (2000 to 2006) have been among his harshest critics.

In all, Mexico has six living ex-presidents, the oldest of whom is 99. The statute of limitations has expired on many of the abuses they are accused of committing, most involving massive corruption, kickbacks, wasting government money and criminal economic mismanagement.

Pena Nieto has kept quiet, but many believe that, if directly provoked, he may have damaging information on Lopez Obrador. Two of the president’s brothers were caught on tape accepting packets of cash while Lopez Obrador was a perennial candidate from 2006 to 2018, which might help explain the president’s decision to throw the choice to the people.

In a way, it looks somewhat like history

repeating itself. Fox became the first opposition candidate to peacefully win the presidency in Mexico’s history in 2000, raising hopes with promises to clean the vermin and black snakes out of government. He didn’t keep that promise.

Lopez Obrador likes referendums, though his past, less formal votes on specific projects have drawn few voters. Moreover, he needs some mass effort to rally supporters whose enthusiasm may be lagging after a tough first three years marked by continued drug cartel violence and a pandemic that has left a high death toll estimated to be around 360,000.

But if the bet was to inspire people with the referendum, it has fallen flat. Electoral regulators rewrote the referendum question into mush, purportedly to prevent the impression that the ex-presidents were being prejudged.

In the end, the question came to read like a wet noodle: Do you agree or not that, within the constitutional and legal framework, actions should be carried out to clear up the political decisions made by politicians in the past, with the aim of guaranteeing justice and the rights of potential victims?

Giant panda in French zoo gives birth to female twins

PARIS (AP): A giant panda on loan to France from China gave birth to two female twin cubs early Monday, a French zoo announced, declaring “they are very lively, pink and plump.”

The Beauval Zoo, south of Paris, said the twins were born shortly after 1 a.m. They weigh 149 and 129 grams (5.3 and 4.6 ounces).

Their mother Huan Huan and father Yuan Zi are at Beauval on a 10-year loan from China aimed at highlighting good ties with France. The twins are their second and third cubs after the first panda ever born in France, Yuan Meng, in 2017.

“Huan Huan is taking care of them very well. She took them in her mouth to lick them and clean them. We can hear

little cries,” the zoo said in a statement.

The zoo said the sex of the cubs were determined by the Chinese experts in charge of taking care of them but will need to be definitively confirmed since external genitalia does not appear until they are several months old.

The birth comes after the zoo announced with great joy in March that Huan Huan and Yuan Zi had “mated eight times.” Veterinarians then carried out an artificial insemination “to have as much chance as possible” to see a pregnancy.

Giant pandas have difficulty breeding and their pregnancies are notoriously difficult to follow.

“We just lived a moment of rare intensity. These births are always

very exceptional but they also bring some surprises,” said Delphine Delord, director of the Beauval Zoo.

The cubs will not be named before 100 days. They will spend a few years in France before being sent to China, the zoo said.

Other nations in Europe also have giant pandas, including Austria, Britain, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and Finland.

There are about 1,800 pandas living in the wild in China and about 500 in captivity worldwide.

China for decades gifted friendly nations with its unofficial national mascot in what was known as “panda diplomacy.” More recently the country has loaned pandas to zoos on commercial terms.

Death toll triples to more than 300 in recent China flooding

BEIJING (AP): More than 300 people died in recent flooding in central China, authorities said Monday, three times the previously announced toll.

The Henan provincial government said 302 people died and 50 remain missing. The vast majority of the victims were in Zhengzhou, the provincial capital, where 292 died and 47 are missing. Ten others died in three other cities, officials said at a news conference in Zhengzhou.

Record rainfall inundated the city on July 20, turning streets into rushing rivers and flooding at least part of a subway line. Video posted online showed vehicles being washed away and desperate people trapped in subway cars as the waters rose. Fourteen people died in the subway flooding.

The previous death toll, announced Friday,

was 99.

Authorities said 189 people were killed by floods and mudslides, 54 in house collapses and 39 in underground areas such as basements and garages and including those on subway Line 5. The death toll remained at six in an expressway tunnel from which 247 vehicles were removed as it was drained.

Wang Kai, the governor of Henan province, expressed deep condolences to the victims and sympathies to the families on behalf of the Henan Communist Party committee.

The worst came after Zhengzhou was hit by 20 centimeters (8 inches) of rain in one hour starting at 4 p.m. on July 20, overwhelming the already drenched city. Children were trapped in schools, and stranded people stayed in their workplaces overnight.

Citing Taliban violence, US expands Afghan refugee program

WASHINGTON (AP): The Biden administration on Monday expanded its efforts to evacuate at-risk Afghan citizens from Afghanistan as Taliban violence increases ahead there of the U.S. military pullout at the end of the month.

The State Department said it is widening the scope of Afghans eligible for refugee status in United States to include current and former employees of U.S.-based news organizations, U.S.-based aid and development agencies and other relief groups that receive U.S. funding. Current and former employees of the U.S. government and the NATO military operation who don’t meet the criteria for a dedicated program for such workers are also covered.

The State Department said the move will mean that “many thousands” of Afghans

and their immediate families will now have the opportunity to be permanently resettled in the U.S. as refugees. It did not offer a more specific number of those who might be eligible for the program.

“The U.S. objective remains a peaceful, secure Afghanistan,” it said in a statement. “However, in light of increased levels of Taliban violence, the U.S. government is working to provide certain Afghans, including those who worked with the United States, the opportunity for refugee resettlement to the United States.”

The creation of a “Priority 2” category for Afghans within the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program is intended for Afghans and their immediate families who “may be at risk due to their U.S. affiliation” but aren’t able to get a Special Immigrant Visa because they did not work directly for the U.S. government or

didn’t hold their government jobs long enough.

To qualify for the Priority 2 category, Afghans must be nominated by a U.S. government agency or by the most senior civilian U.S. citizen employee of a U.S.-based media outlet or nongovernmental organization.

The first group of Afghan Special Immigrant Visa applicants — most of whom served as translators or did other work for U.S. troops or diplomats — who have cleared security vetting arrived in the U.S. on Friday. That group of 221 people are among 2,500 who will be brought to the U.S. in the coming days.

Another 4,000 SIV applicants, plus their families, who have not yet cleared the security screening are expected to be relocated to third countries ahead of the completion of the U.S. withdrawal. Roughly 20,000 Afghans have expressed interest in the program.

The Big Pic



SUPER SELFIE! The star, Zoey Deutch has some fun with her phone while shooting her new movie in NYC.

Charles Connor, drummer for Little Richard, dies at age 86

LOS ANGELES (AP): Charles Connor, known for being Little Richard's drummer who performed with other music greats including James Brown and Sam Cooke, has died. He was 86.

Connor's daughter, Queenie Connor Sonnefeld, said her father died peacefully in his sleep early Saturday while under hospice care at his home in Glendale, California. She said her father had been diagnosed with normal pressure hydrocephalus, a brain disorder that causes fluid buildup.

Connor Sonnefeld called the drummer a "great father" who was always positive and a person who never gave up on his dreams.

"He was one of those drummers that was a bricklayer of creating that rock 'n' roll genre," she said. "He played behind so many legendary musicians in the 1950s. He was a loving grandfather and was very proud of his family and took a lot of pride in his contributions to rock 'n' roll."

Connor began playing drums at age 12. Three years later, he started his professional career when Professor Longhair, a singer and pianist, hired him as a last-minute replacement for the 1950 Mardi Gras in New Orleans.

After Connor turned 18, he joined Rich-



ard's original road band, The Upsetters. The band appeared in several popular feature films including "The Girl Can't Help It" with Jayne Mansfield along with "Don't Knock the Rock" and "Mr. Rock 'n' Roll."

During his career, Connor toured with various musicians such as James Brown, Jackie Wilson and the original Coasters. He also received a certificate of special recognition from Rep. Maxine Waters in 1994.

Connor released his motivational book "Don't Give Up Your Dreams: You Can Be a Winner Too!" 2008. He was inducted into the Louisiana Music Hall of Fame two years later.

In 2013, Connor released his EP album "Still Knockin." At the time of his death, he was working on his autobiographical documentary.

NHL Star Evander Kane Denies Wife's Allegations That He Bet on His Own Games

After the NHL announced it was launching an investigation into Anna Kane alleging Evander Kane bet on his own games, the athlete responded by vehemently denying his wife's accusations.

Evander Kane is speaking out following allegations from his wife.

After Anna Kane wrote on her Instagram Story on Saturday, July 31 that the NHL star allegedly has previously bet on his own hockey games, Evander shared a message to social media the following day to deny the claims. The 30-year-old athlete, whose message refers to Anna as his "estranged wife, welcomed daughter Kensington with Anna in July 2020, according to a previous tweet.

"Unfortunately I would like to address the completely FALSE accusations that my estranged wife and soon to be ex wife has made against me," the San Jose Sharks player posted on Sunday, August 1. "Even against the advice of my legal team I feel strongly that the public and fans hear this directly from me. I have NEVER gambled/bet on Hockey, NEVER gambled/bet on a Sharks game, NEVER gambled/bet on any of my games and NEVER thrown a hockey game."

Evander continued, "The facts are I personally had my best season of the my career last year and was the most consistent I've been throughout any season, I'm proud of that. I love the game of Hockey and would never do any of what was alleged. I look forward to cooperating fully with the league's investigation, having my name cleared and looking



forward to this upcoming season."

On Saturday, July 31, the NHL's official Twitter account for its Communications Department shared a statement saying the league plans to "conduct a full investigation" into the allegations against Evander.

"The League was made aware this evening of a post on social media alleging that San Jose Sharks Player Evander Kane bet on NHL games," the message read. "The integrity of our game is paramount and the League takes these allegations very seriously. We intend to conduct a full investigation and will have no further comment at this time."

Earlier that day, according to the Associated Press, Anna had written on her Instagram Story, "How does the NHL let a compulsive gambling addict still play when he's obviously throwing games to win money? Hmm maybe someone

needs to address this."

She also tagged NHL commissioner Gary Bettman in a message that read, "Can someone ask Gary Bettman how they let a player gamble on his own games? Bet and win with bookies on his own games?"

On August 1, Anna continued sharing messages about Evander to her Story. "He doesn't want to get help, he doesn't want to be a real man and father," she wrote. "He wants to be able to gamble and live freely."

Evander addressed Anna's comments about his parenting in an additional message. "With recent allegations that me ex wife chose to make public, I want to clearly respond as follows," he wrote in part. "I love my daughter. I will and always have taken care of my daughter in ever way possible. I have always made sure her mother has had everything she's needed and more."

Chinese-Canadian pop star detained on suspicion of rape

TAIPEI, TAIWAN (AP): Chinese-Canadian pop star Kris Wu has been detained by Beijing police on suspicion of rape, police announced Saturday, following an accusation the former member of the Korean boy band EXO lured young women into sexual relationships.

Wu, 30, earlier was accused by a teenager of having sex with her while she was drunk. Wu denied the accusation.

The teenager said seven other women contacted her to say Wu seduced them with promises of jobs and other opportunities. She said some were under 18 but gave no indication whether they were younger than China's age of consent of 14.

Wu has been "criminally detained" on suspicion of rape "in response to relevant information reported on the internet" including that he "repeatedly lured young women to have sexual relations," the police statement said. It gave no other details.

The pop star had previously denied the accusations. "There was no 'groupie sex'! There was no 'underage'!" Wu wrote last month on his social media account. "If there were this kind of thing, please everyone relax, I would put myself in jail!"

The news was trending as the no. 1 most searched



topic on Weibo on Saturday night, and some users online started commenting on Wu's social media account, telling him to "Get out of China!"

Wu is a Canadian citizen, according to the police statement.

The official paper of the Communist Party, the People's Daily, weighed in on the case, saying in a short opinion post online that "Having a foreign nationality is not a protective talisman, and no matter how big the name is, there is no immunity."

The teenager publicized her accusations on social media and later in an interview with the internet portal NetEase. A day after that interview appeared, at least 10 brands including Porsche and Louis Vuitton broke off endorsement and other deals with Wu.

According to the interview, she thought she was meeting Wu for a career opportunity. Instead, his staff

who was present forced her to drink. As someone who did not go to bars, she said her tolerance was low and she was drunk after two drinks. The next day, she woke up in Wu's bed. That morning, he was kind to her and promised to take care of her, she said.

The teenager said that was the beginning of what she had thought was their relationship. This was the case until March, when he stopped returning her messages.

At first, she said she felt sorry for herself. But after she learned that there were other women who had been treated similarly, she said she felt there were others who were worse off.

"I don't believe this is just my own personal matter. You can even say that this is a problem with the atmosphere in China's entertainment circle," she said in the NetEase interview.

Wu said that he had met

the young woman on Dec. 5, 2020, but "I didn't force her to drink," and "there was not this sort of 'details' she describes."

"I didn't expect my silence to encourage these rumors, and I couldn't stand it!" Wu previously wrote. "There were a lot of people there that day who can bear witness."

In an unexpected twist to the story, police said last week they had arrested a man who attempted to defraud both parties. The man, surnamed Liu, pretended to be a victim who'd had a similar experience with Wu in order to elicit personal information from the young woman.

The teenager and Wu both said they had asked authorities to investigate.

Saturday's statement didn't mention that case and gave no information about the status of that investigation.

ARIES:

We all have an idea of how the people in our lives should and shouldn't be—ideas that contribute to the burden of our expectations. Just for today, let go of any and all checklists. Come as you are and hold space for the people in your life to do just the same. The energy of unconditional love and acceptance will help heal the most complex of your relationships.

TAURUS:

Sometimes, we have to take a break from the outside world in order to explore the little worlds that exist inside of us. So, allow yourself to dream a little dream and board that metaphorical flight of fantasy. Existing in between realms is the only therapy you need right now. As such, this is also a time of turning your wounds into wisdom. Your past pain is the sweet elixir that has helped you transform on a soul level.

GEMINI:

We all have a little bit of madness and a little bit of chaos inside of us—and it is this lethal combination that inspires us to bring magic without. Pay attention to the manner in which this magic wants to be expressed through you today as you commit to taking life by the horns. Remember, following the rules that were handed down to you will only take you this far. Being bold in your decisions, on the other hand, will help you reach new heights, Gemini.

CANCER:

Begin the week by ruminating over the Hermetic principle

'as above, so below' as a reminder of your superpowers. You are the co-creator of your reality. Cancer, and every thought, word, and action is helping you create this world for yourself. So, what will you choose to put out there today? Will you act from a space of limitation or believe in your own potential? Something tells us that your days of playing rookie are behind you.

LEO:

There are two kinds of people in the world: people who merely go through the motions and people who consistently create from the space of passion. We have no doubts about which of the two categories you fall into. So, reconnect with the inner fire that's burning bright and actively work towards transforming thoughts to things. As you do, let go of your attachment towards a specific outcome. The secret to allowing what's best for you into your existence is by trusting the Universal wisdom.

VIRGO:

The thing is, when we're emotionally attached to something or somebody, our perception of them is usually coloured by our feelings. In such cases, it's easy to miss the red flags or give them the benefit of doubt that they do not deserve. Could you be betraying yourself in the process, though? Something to think about under the waning moon. Words of wisdom by Maya Angelou to give you the perspective you need: "When somebody shows you who they are, believe them the first time."

LIBRA:

This is a time of many firsts, Libra. A time of hope, optimism, and new beginnings. You're actively making space for who and what you love, as you banish the fears that have kept you from opening your heart. What's more, you're disengaging from that old game of tug-of-war. You trust what's yours and you trust the Universe to deliver it to you. It's all working in accordance with the law of divine timing, beautiful.

SCORPIO:

A change of address or relocation may be on the cards for some of you. Given the pace at which things are unfolding, it will be easy for you to lose touch with reality. Keep your feet firmly planted on the ground, Scorpio. You want to be fully accountable for the decisions you will make from now on. Remember, being cautious is not the same as operating from a space of fear, though. Trust what's come into your life and trust that it is for your highest good.

SAGITTARIUS:

Given the circumstances under which you are reconnecting, it will be easy for you to romanticize the situation. Don't get carried away, Sagittarius. The more you stay in your centre, the easier it will be for you to read the signs. Chances are, they haven't changed like they claim they have. There is some more inner work to do here. It's best to maintain a certain amount of distance lest you end up dealing with the collateral damage.

CAPRICORN:

There comes a point in every seeker's journey where the

voice of the guru without interferes with the voice of the guru within. A time when the holy books and scriptures, no matter how revered, start to lose their meaning and direct experiences promises to be the only way forward. This is where you are in *your* journey, Capricorn. So, trust where the compass is pointing you towards and take a step in the right direction. You are in the midst of ascending to a whole new level of consciousness.

AQUARIUS:

"The best among us are not more gifted than the rest. They just take little steps each day as they march toward their biggest life." Robin Sharma's two cents on arriving at that place called extraordinary, Aquarius. What you're being asked to do today is believe in the life you're manifesting for yourself as you continue to move in the right direction. The failures have got nothing on you. We repeat: the failures have got nothing on you!

PISCES:

We all have an idea of the life we want to create, and what we need in order to achieve the desired results. However, things don't always go in accordance with our plan, Pisces, in which case we are quick to adopt the failure narrative. Pay attention to how and where you are repeating the old story, thus giving it more power than it deserves. It's important to view your circumstances from a higher perspective and manage the expectations that are weighing you down.