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FOR BREACH OF CONTRACT  
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**'FLEABAG' ACTOR BEN  
ALDRIDGE JOINS FILM  
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# SummitTIMES

Vol 06 | Issue194 | Gangtok | Saturday | 31 July 2021

ON TOP OF THE NEWS

RNI No. SIKENG/2016/69420

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## Flash-flood tears through Sikkim Rail tunnel site, claims on life



**SMRITA KHAWAS  
DARJEELING, 30 JUL:**

One person has been killed, two injured and five are missing after the labour camp they were staying in at Mamkhola near Rangpo got washed away early this morning by a rivulet which had swollen up due to heavy

rainfall.

The 8 were laborers working for ITDCL Railway construction company and were engaged in the construction of Sevoke-Rangpo rail project.

Locals rescued 3 persons who were admitted in Sikkim and Kalimpong hospitals.

However, one of them, 35-year-old Dhan Singh Bhandari of Nepal was declared brought dead at Kalimpong hospital. The other two are admitted in a Sikkim hospital.

Search and rescue operations for the 5 missing persons is on involving local police and rafting team. A di-

saster management team is also on the way from Dabgram while one sniffer dog is also being sent from Siliguri to assist the search.

Meanwhile, vehicular traffic along this route has been diverted as multiple landslides have affected many roads in the Darjeeling district.

## Chongrang panchayats start issuing e-certificates

**PRITAM LAMA  
GYALSHING, 30 JUL:**

People of six Gram Panchayats under Chongrang block in West Sikkim can now get various certificates like OBC, income, etc., online.

Chongrang BAC has six GPUs with some remote villages like Dhupi-Norkhola, Karg-ee-Mangnam and Mangder.

"We recently provided training to employees of IT section at every GPU under the Chongrang BAC to enable them to help people with e-certification. Those who don't have access to internet can apply by visiting their respective Gram Panchayat Kendras," said BDO, Garap Dorjee Bhutia.

So far the Block Ad-



ministrative Centre has received 63 applications out of which 62 certificates were issued. The first e-certificate was issued on 28 July.

On 09 July, training was provided to two employees from each GPU so that they can help the public in uploading documents.

As of now, BAC Chongrang is issuing

OBC, income and unmarried certificates. The IT team at Chongrang-BAC got trained at Gyalshing under the direction of DC West.

One can apply for e-certificates through smartphones or computers by uploading required documents and after verification by BAC Chongrang, the certificates will be approved and issued.

The IT section at the BAC is available from Monday to Friday and will respond immediately to the people who apply during the working hours.

The Chongrang BDO plans to provide training to youth willing to work voluntarily from every village under the block in order to realize the dream of digital India, it was informed.

## Covid claims 5 more in Sikkim, week's toll 12 in six days

**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 30 JUL:**

Sikkim's COVID death toll climbed to 342 with five more COVID fatalities reported in the last 24 hours. With the four lives lost to the virus yesterday, one of them a month-old baby with congenital complications, a 29 year old, a 42 year old and an 84 year old, the State has lost nine to Covid in two days. The week's count [[25-30 July] stands at 12. By comparison, the previous week [18-24 July] had seen 9 Covid deaths.

Out of five new COVID deaths, three were reported from STNM Hospital and two from Central Referral Hospital.

Meanwhile, 179 more tested positive for Covid in the testing of 1,487 samples on Thursday giving the state a daily test positivity rate of 12%.

Out these new cases, 65 were

registered in East District, 34 in West District, 79 in South District and 01 in North District.

On the other hand, the state's figure of recovered cases further improved to 22,398 with the discharge of 169 persons from home and facility isolation on Thursday.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department, 95 new cases were detected in RT-PCR testing of 700 samples and 84 in rapid antigen testing of 783 samples.

The state's tally of confirmed



cases of COVID-19 has now reached 26,311.

There are currently 3,302 active Covid cases in Sikkim, of whom only 107 are in hospital with symptoms severe enough to require medical attention while the rest are recovering in home or facility isolation. The 107 include 20 who were hospitalized today and the 10 currently in ICU.

## 3 from Kalimpong win medals in National Taekwondo C'ship



**SUMMIT REPORT**

**GANGTOK, 30 JUL:**

Three martial artists from Kalimpong clinched medals in the National Taekwondo Poomsae Virtual Championship 2021. These martial artists are members of Taekwondo World Dojang affiliated to Kalimpong District Taekwondo Association and Associates with GHATA.

Bengal Khel Samman Awardee Master Trilok Subba became the

national champion. He won a gold medal in master category with a score of 7.1 beating Rajesh Khelari of Maharashtra, who scored 6.9 in the finals.

Likewise, Adwayti Subba won a bronze medal in black belt junior female category after losing to Maharashtra, while Divya Sharma also bagged a bronze medal in the colour belt junior female category after losing to Uttar Pradesh. It is added that another member, Eden-

la Sherpa lost in the semi-final.

The Championship was organised by India Taekwondo which is recognized by Indian Olympic Association and World Taekwondo, world Governing body.

Trilok Subba expressed his happiness at winning his 18th national gold medal. He further said that it was great news for Kalimpong District, GTA and West Bengal as three Taekwondo players won medals in the national championship.

## Hyderabad FC sign Nim Dorjee Tamang and Gurmeet Singh

**HYDERABAD, JUL 30 (PTI):** Adding more quality to a youthful contingent, Indian Super League side Hyderabad FC have completed the signings of defender Nim Dorjee Tamang and goalkeeper Gurmeet Singh for the long-term, the club announced on Friday.

The duo who join from North-East United have each signed three-year contracts till the end of the 2023-24 season.

A center-back who can also fill in at right-back, Nim Dorjee hails from Sikkim and started his career with Shillong Lajong where he made 45 I-League appearances, gaining valuable experience at a young age.

Nim Dorjee, who has played for the Highlanders since 2019, already has 18 ISL appearances to his name to add to two caps for the India U19s.

"I am really excited to be a part of Hyderabad FC, a team which has good young and experienced play-

ers. The club has played top-quality football last season and I am delighted to be a part of the club's journey," said the 25-year-old after completing his move.

Twenty-one-year-old Gurmeet Singh is another promising youngster who will join Manolo Marquez's side for the upcoming campaign.

A talented goalkeeper, he has spent the last three seasons with NEUFC and will look to provide more competition for a place under the bar in the first team. He featured eight times for the Highlanders last season keeping two clean sheets.

"I am grateful to the club for providing me this opportunity. As a young player, seeing others my age flourish here makes this a really important project for me," said Gurmeet.

"It is a very important season for us at Hyderabad FC. We will look to build on the campaign last

season and I am sure we as a team are ready for the challenges," he added.

The duo takes the number of young Indian arrivals at the club to five following Aniket Jadhav, Aar-en D'Silva and Abdul Rabeeh, and Manolo Marquez believes these additions are important for the club in the upcoming season.

"Gurmeet is a good goalkeeper, and someone who can become one of the best in India soon. He is young but has experience, is quick with his movements in goal, trains hard, and wants to improve in every session.

"Nim Dorjee is a defender who can play as a center-back or as a full-back. He also has good positioning and played at a high-level last season," said Manolo.

"As a coach, you want youngsters like these, who can play in different positions which is really crucial for us this season," he added.

## Slides and slips litter Kalimpong

**SUMMIT REPORT  
KALIMPONG, 30 JUL:**

Heavy overnight rain delivered a string of landslides in Kalimpong with places like Bhalukhop, Sherpa Gaon, Novelty, Chisopani, Mahakal Dhara and Soureny more severely affected.

The residents recall that the intensity of the rain was frightening and showed them what a cloudburst must feel like. While the ferocity of the rain caused substantial damage, it also helped hasten res-



cue efforts since most neighbourhoods stayed

up through the night and were quick to alert

neighbours and evacuate them in time.



## DC South inspects rainfall damage at Melli

**NAMCHI, 30 JUL [IPR]:** District Collector (South), M. Bharani Kumar along with Additional Political Secretary to CM [South], Anjeeta Rajalim, carried out inspection of damages at Kerabari, Chalisey and Melli Bazaar caused by heavy rainfall in the wee hours of Friday. He was accompanied by BDO Sumbuk and DPO South.

The damages are extensive through the village wards. Melli Bazaar as of now is completely cut off from other parts of Sikkim and West Bengal as all the approach formation of the roads towards Melli Bazaar



have been washed. Few Government

properties such as Sr Sec School, Melli, SBS Mel-

li have been inundated with debris.

The main cause of damages was found to be inadequate drains coupled by torrential rains. Concerned Revenue Surveyor has been directed to make door-to-door visit of damaged houses.

Early morning rescue operations were carried out by the Police to recover the body of Gyan Bdr Subba who was found buried under debris.

Three households have been evacuated and relocated at Handloom Building. About 08 (Eight) houses have been severely damaged.

## Approve civic body's plan to re-vaccinate fake inoculation camp victims: High Court to Centre

**MUMBAI, 30 JUL [PTI]:** The Bombay High Court on Friday directed the Union government to approve the proposed plan of action of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to re-vaccinate those citizens, who had fallen victim to several fake anti-coronavirus vaccination camps in different parts of the city a few months ago.

A bench of Chief Justice Dipankar Datta and Justice GS Kulkarni directed the Centre to approve the Mumbai civic body's

plan of action, "with or without modifications, within seven days" from now.

The directions came after senior counsel Anil Sakhre, who appeared for the BMC, told the High Court that it had re-vaccinated 161 of the 2,053 people, who had fallen victim to such fake camps.

Mr Sakhre had told the high court earlier this month that the victims had been administered saline water instead of the anti-COVID-19 vaccine.

"Of the 391 cases at Hiranandani in Kandivali, 363 people were traced and 161 of them were vaccinated. We are in the process of getting the remaining of the total 2,053 victims re-registered on the CoWin portal so that they can be re-vaccinated correctly," Mr Sakhre told the court.

He submitted the civic body's plan of action that proposed, among other things, de-registering all such victims from the CoWin portal so that they can re-register on the por-

tal afresh and get the correct vaccine administered.

Mr Sakhre said that the victims could not get re-registered without the Centre's approval.

At this, Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, who appeared for the Union government, told the high court that although de-registration from the portal was not possible presently, the Centre will look into it.

"For the time being, the victims can re-register on the portal for vaccination," Mr Singh said.

## Lionsgate Play to premiere 60 exclusive titles in India over next 12 months

**MUMBAI, JUL 30 (PTI):** Lionsgate Play, the premium streaming platform from Starz Global, on Friday announced that it will premiere 60 English titles including blockbuster movies and series such as the Oscar-winner "The Father", "Cold Pursuit" and "Dr Death" for the Indian audiences over the next one year.

The other prominent upcoming titles include "Spiral", "Way Down", "Till Death", "Vigil", "Heels", "The Pier" and "Spy City", releasing every Friday.

Lionsgate Play boasts the largest library curated from global giants like BBC, Lionsgate, ITV, NBC,

Endeavour.

The OTT platform has in the past released critically-acclaimed shows like "Normal People", "The Pact", "Wrath of Man", "The Goes Wrong Show", "Seduced: Inside NXIM Cult", "The Girlfriend Experience" and "Home Economics" to name a few.

Amit Dhanuka, Executive Vice President at Lionsgate, said the streamer will continue to offer the best of Hollywood in six different Indian languages for the audiences in the country, besides coming up with Indian originals.

"I am very thrilled to share that in the



coming year we have a strong lineup of 60-70 titles for our subscribers. Curated by the best studios we are looking at strengthening our content slate with edgy, bold, and strong storylines. My

personal favourite is Anthony Hopkins-starrer "The Father".

"Keeping our user's preference in mind we will continue to localise our content in six Indian languages so they can enjoy the best of Hollywood

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## Madan Puraskar announces shortlist of nine books for award

**KATHMANDU, 30 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Madan Puraskar Guthi on Friday announced that it has shortlisted nine books out of a list of 222 books it received for the Madan Puraskar 2021.

The shortlisted books are: Eklavya Ko Debre

Haat by Giri Shreesh Magar, Kariya by Krishna Abiral, Kalpa Grantha by Kumar Nagarkoti, Nrityakshar Vigyan by Bhairab Bahadur Thapa, Filingo by Prabha Baral, Fulange by Lekhnath Chhettri, Mokshabhu-mi by Keshav Dahal, Ramite by Jason Kun-

war, Limbuwan Ko Etihask Dastawaj Sangrah (1719-2020) by Bhagiraj Ingnam.

Although a maximum of 10 books are shortlisted, the recommendation committee recommended only nine, according to the trust.

Books with unpub-

lished materials were given preference in the shortlist, it said in a statement.

Madan Puraskar is given to the best book published in the Nepal language in a given year and was established in 1955, according to Madan Puraskar Guthi.

## Three trekkers missing in HP's Lahaul-Spiti

**SHIMLA, JUL 30 (PTI):** Three trekkers have gone missing in Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul-Spiti district, a senior official said here on Thursday.

State Disaster Management Director Sudesh Kumar Mokhta said a Rajasthan trekker, Nikunj Jaiswal, and his two companions went missing at Ghepan Peak.

Details of the two others are not available so far, he added.



As per information received from the Sissu police check-post, Nikunj Jaiswal of Bikaner in Rajasthan and his two companions were stay-

ing at Hotel Triveni in the village.

They left for trekking to Ghepan Peak Lake on Monday and were supposed to come back on

July 29, he added.

However, they did not reach their destination.

The search for the missing tourists has been initiated, he added.

## Akshay Kumar's 'Bellbottom' to release theatrically on August 19



**MUMBAI, JUL 30 (PTI):** Superstar Akshay Kumar on Friday announced that his much-anticipated movie "Bellbottom" will arrive in cinemas on August 19.

The espionage thriller was originally scheduled to release in April this year, but was postponed to July 27 due to the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic in India.

As the theatres open

across the world and various parts of the country, the producers have locked a new release date for the movie.

"Mission: To Entertain you on the BIG SCREEN. Date: August 19, 2021. Announcing the arrival of #BellBottom! #BellBottomInCinemasAug19," Kumar posted on Twitter.

Vashu Bhagnani is backing the film along with

Jacky Bhagnani, Deepshikha Deshmukh, Monisha Advani, Madhu Bhojwani and Nikkhil Advani.

Directed by Ranjit M Tewari, "Bellbottom" is set in the 1980s and revolves around one of India's forgotten heroes.

Written by Aseem Arrora and Parveen Shaikh, the film also features actors Lara Dutta, Huma Qureshi and Vaani Kapoor.

## Japan to widen virus emergency after record spike amid Games

**TOKYO, JUL 30 (AP):** Japan is set to expand the coronavirus state of emergency in Tokyo to neighbouring areas and the western city of Osaka on Friday in the wake of record-breaking surge in infections while the capital hosts the Olympics. A government panel approved the plan putting Saitama, Kanagawa and Chiba, as well as Osaka, under the state of emergency from Monday until Aug. 31. The measures already in place in Tokyo and the southern island of Okinawa will be extended until the end of August.

Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga is scheduled to officially announce the measures later Friday. Five other areas, including Hokkaido, Kyoto, Hyogo and Fukuoka, will be placed under less-stringent emergency restrictions.

Tokyo has reported a record rise in cases for

three days in a row, including 3,865 on Thursday. The cases have doubled since last week, and officials have warned they may hit 4,500 a day within two weeks.

Officials said 2,995 were hospitalized, about half the current capacity of 6,000 beds, with some hospitals already full. More than 10,000 others were isolating at home or designated hotels, with nearly 5,600 waiting at home while health centers decide where they will be treated.

At Friday's meeting of government experts, Health Minister Norihisa Tamura said the spike in Tokyo despite being under the state of emergency for two weeks is an alarming development that is different from anything we have seen before.

Nationwide, Japan reported 10,687 confirmed cases Thursday,



exceeding 10,000 for the first time. It has recorded 15,166 fatalities from COVID-19, including 2,288 in Tokyo, since the pandemic began.

Japan has kept its cases and deaths lower than many other countries, but its seven-day rolling average is growing and now stands at 28 per 100,000 people nationwide and 88 per 100,000 in Tokyo, according to the Health Ministry. This com-


pared to 18.5 in the United States, 48 in Britain and 2.8 in India, according to data from Johns Hopkins University.

The emergency measures focus on an alcohol ban at eateries and karaoke bars and their shortened hours, but they have become less effective because people are only requested to stay and work from home. Many were defying the measures at a time when the more

infectious delta strain is spreading.

Tokyo Gov Yuriko Koike noted that adults in their 30s or younger dominate recent cases and reminded them of following basic anti-virus measures including mask-wearing and avoiding having parties.

As of Thursday, 27 per cent of the Japanese population has been fully vaccinated. The percentage of the elderly who are fully vaccinated is 71.5 per cent.



### 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"> <li>● Fever</li> <li>● Difficulty in breathing</li> <li>● Dry Cough</li> <li>● Severe acute respiratory syndrome</li> <li>● Pneumonia - like symptoms</li> </ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Wash your hands often with soap.</li> <li>● Use an alcohol based hand sanitizer</li> <li>● Observe good personal hygiene.</li> <li>● Avoid touching your face with unwashed hands.</li> <li>● Avoid contact with people with possible symptoms.</li> <li>● Avoid contact with animals and consumption of undercooked meats.</li> <li>● Avoid travel to nCoV affected places.</li> <li>● Wear a mask if you have respiratory syndrome and cover your mouth while coughing or sneezing.</li> </ul> |
| Treatment  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Treatment is symptomatic and supportive, based on the patient's clinical condition.</li> <li>● No vaccinations available as of now</li> <li>● Visit Doctor in case symptoms detected</li> </ul> | <div style="text-align: center;">  <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> </div>   |

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & FAMILY WELFARE**  
**GOVERNMENT OF SIKKIM**



# Govt empanels CRH for Su-Swastha Yojana

**SAGAR CHETTRI**  
**GANGTOK, 30 JUL:**

Central Referral Hospital, Tadong, has been empanelled under the recently launched Su-Swastha Yojana of the State Government. Regarding the same, a tripartite agreement was signed between Central Referral Hospital, Swadhi Health and the State Government on Friday. Su-Swastha Yojana is the Employees' Health Services Scheme of the Sikkim Government. The scheme aims to provide healthcare services to employees of the Government of Sikkim and their dependents for a cashless benefit covering hospitalization across top tier hospitals in India. Swadhi Health is a service provider of the scheme to monitor, support and assist the insured persons to avail the facilities.

Dean Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences, Dr Muralidhar V Pai mentioned that the aim of the Medical Foundation was to provide the best health services to the people of Sikkim and neighbouring regions.

He added that CRH is also in the process of upgrading all its services and further adding latest healthcare facilities to provide the best health services to the people of



Sikkim at their doorstep. He informed that hospital has also been bringing the best doctors from outside.

Likewise, CRH Medical Superintendent, Dr Yogesh Verma expressed gratitude to the State Government for partnering with CRH and for providing an opportunity to serve the people of Sikkim. He further expressed that this partnership would definitely prove fruitful in the future.

He mentioned that the scheme is for private and semi-private wards and if private rooms are not available then general beds would be applicable at a 30% discount. He

added that the scheme also covers pre-existing disease and new born babies. He further informed that dental care is also covered under the scheme.

Swadhi Health founder, Dr Gaurav Kumar expressed happiness on the collaboration with CRH under the Employees' Health Services Scheme of the State Government. He added that the scheme is very important as it provides speciality and super-speciality health services to the employees and their dependents.

He informed that the scheme covers around 1.30 lakhs regular government employees of the State and their five

dependants and healthcare insurance upto Rs 20 lakhs, of which Rs 10 lakhs for base care and additional Rs 10 lakhs for critical care cover.

Dr Kumar mentioned that Su-Swastha Yojana is a transformational healthcare initiative of the State Government as it has the largest healthcare insurance of Rs 20 lakhs in the country run by the government and the least premium amount in the country of Rs 200 per person every month contributed by a person under the scheme.

He appealed to the people to take full benefit

of the scheme.

On the occasion, two new units, Emergency ICU and OBG High-Definition Unit of Central Referral Hospital were also inaugurated by Dean Sikkim Manipal Institute of Medical Sciences, Dr Muralidhar V Pai. The MS informed that these new facilities have state-of-the-art facilities.

It is informed that OBG High-Definition Unit is 10-bed for post-operative cases treatment and also has facility for special-care for pregnant women. It is added that the Emergency ICU is six-bedded and equipped with ventilators, monitors and defibrillators and trained ER doctors.

## Pegasus snooping scandal: Israel launches probe into allegations against NSO

**JERUSALEM, JUL 30 (PTI):** Israel has launched a probe into the allegations of wrongdoing against the NSO Group in the Pegasus snooping scandal, with authorities inspecting the cybersecurity company's offices over alleged abuses of its spyware by several government clients which have raised eyebrows the world over.

Representatives of several bodies visited the office of NSO to assess the allegations raised in regards to the company on Wednesday, a spokesperson for Israel's Ministry of Defence said.

When asked to share details, she told PTI that "we aren't elaborating at the moment".

Local media reports said that the bodies conducting the inspection are the Export Control Division of the Ministry of Defence and the National Security Council, which is also authorised to conduct investigations if necessary.

The focus of the investigation is to examine whether the company acted in accordance with the permits and powers granted to it by the Export Control Division of the Ministry of Defence, the reports said.

The alleged use of the Pegasus software to spy on journalists, human rights defenders, politicians and others in a number of countries, including India, triggered concerns over issues relating to privacy.

Politicians, rights activists and journalists were among those targeted with phone spyware sold to various governments by the Israeli firm, according to an international media

consortium.

Amid reports of the use of spyware against French President Emmanuel Macron, Israeli Defence Minister, Benny Gantz, visited Paris on Wednesday and assured his French counterpart, Florence Parly that Jerusalem is taking the issue "seriously".

"Minister Gantz addressed the topic of NSO and stated that Israel is taking the allegations seriously. He noted that the State of Israel approves the export of cyber products exclusively to governmental entities, for lawful use and only for the purpose of preventing and investigating crime and counter terrorism," a spokesperson for the Israeli Defence Minister said. "He also informed Minister Parly that officials visited NSO's office (Wednesday) and that Israel is investigating the allegations thoroughly", she said.

Israel last week established a committee to review the allegations of misuse of the NSO group's surveillance software and hinted at a possible "review of the whole matter of giving licences".

The defence establishment appointed a review committee made up of a number of bodies," lawmaker Ram Ben-Barak, the head of Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, had announced without sharing further details.

When they finish their review, we'll demand to see the results and assess whether we need to make corrections," Ben-Barak, who earlier was the former deputy head of Israel's Mossad spy agency, added.

## SUBSIDIARY INTELLIGENCE BUREAU

(MHA), GOVT OF INDIA

Balwakhani, Rajbhawan

Gangtok, Sikkim - 737103

### AUCTION NOTICE

No. 08/2021

Dated: 31.07.2021

Open bidders are invited for disposal of old Diesel Generator 16 BHP (02 Nos.) External Secondary Battery 12 V/88AH (12 Nos.), UPS 2KVA (01 No.), UPS 1 KVA (04 Nos.), Inverter 800 VA (1 No.), Battery Charger (1 No.), Dot Matrix Printer (9 Nos), Fax machine (04 nos.), Digital Camera (04 nos) and Handycam (01 no). The bidders are required to deposit Earnest Money of Rs. 5000/- in cash (refundable). Interested bidders, **having GST number** may inspect the items on any working day w.e.f August 02 to 11 from 11 am to 4 pm. **The open bidding will be started at 11 am on August 12, 2021** in presence of the board members. Highest bidder shall have to deposit shall have to deposit minimum 25% of the bid value in cash on the spot. The goods shall be handed over to successful bidder only after receiving the balance amount and GST receipt, as applicable and as per rules. The decision of the authority shall be final and binding.

*Sd/-*  
*Assistant Director.*

## BEFORE THE SUB DIVISIONAL MAGISTRATE AT GANGTOK EAST SIKKIM

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Tek Bahadur Basnett @ Tika Ram Basnett @ Tek Bahadur Chettri, s/o late Sher Bahadur Basnett aged about 76 years, Hindu by faith, by occupation retired employee Yuksom Breweries Limited, South Sikkim, R/O Lower Melli gumpa, P.O. & P.S. Melli, South Sikkim, do hereby solemnly and declare on oath as follows:

1. That "Chettri" is our caste and "Basnett" is my title from the same caste "Chettri" which are the different nomenclatures of the same caste and are often used synonymously.
2. The followings are my son's and daughter's:  
i) Yagendra Chettri (daughter), ii) Champa Chettri (Daughter), iii) Ambika Chettri (daughter) iv) Narendra Kumar Chettri (son), v) Milan Kumar Chettri (son), vi) Mon Kumar Chettri (son), vii) Shreeman Chettri (son)
3. That in my Old Sikkim Subject Certificate registered vide sl.no. 112, Volume no. 11 under Block Chinzey, my name has been recorded as Tika Ram Basnett, whereas, in some of the relevant documents my name has been recorded as Tek Bahadur Chettri and also as Tek Bahadur Basnett.
4. That as such in some of my relevant documents of my children name above my name has been recorded as Tek Bahadur Basnett and also as Tika Ram Basnett as well as Tek Bahadur Chettri also as Tek Bahadur Basnett.
5. That therefore, all names that has been recorded as Tika Ram Basnett, Tek Bahadur Chettri and Tek Bahadur Basnett are one and the same identical person i.e. myself. But by virtue of this affidavit, I shall be using my title as Tek Bahadur Basnett in all official & practical purports, purposes, intents, deeds, transaction etc henceforth.
6. That this affidavit is made bonafide.

**DEPONENT**  
**Tek Bahadur Basnett alias Tika Ram Basnett.**

## BEFORE THE SUB DIVISIONAL MAGISTRATE AT GANGTOK EAST SIKKIM

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Milan Kumar Chettri (Basnett), so of Tika Ram Basnett (Chettri) aged about 42 years, by occupation Govt. employee, by faith hindu, resident of Chenjey, Rumtek, East Sikkim, P.O. & P.S Ranipool, East Sikkim, do hereby solemnly affirm on Oath and declare as under:-

1. That I am natural son of Tika Ram Basnett.
2. That my father's actual and correct name is Tika Ram Basnett (Chettri) which has been recorded in his Sikkim Subject Certificate vide Sl.no. 112, vol.no. 11 under block Chenjey, issued by Land Revenue Department Government of Sikkim.
3. That inadvertently in my aadhar card his name has been recorded as Tek Bahadur Chettri bearing registration no. 7442 1941 5581 issued by unique Identification Authority of India, and also same in my Certificate of Identification.
4. That in my Certificate of Identification my serial no. and volume No. has not mentioned.
5. That Chettri is our caste and Basnett is our sub caste.
6. That the name Tika Ram Basnet and Tek Bahadur Chettri refers and denotes to one and same person i.e. myself
7. That his affidavit is made bonafide and to give the above declaration on oath.

*Sd/-*  
*Milan Kumar Chettri*  
**DEPONENT**

## BEFORE THE ADDITIONAL DISTRICT MAGISTRATE AT GANGTOK EAST SIKKIM

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Mon Kumar Chettri (Basnett), son of Tika Ram Basnett aged about 40 years, by occupation private employee by faith Hindu, resident of Chenjey, Rumtek, East Sikkim, P.O. & P.S. Ranipool, East Sikkim, do hereby solemnly affirm on Oath and declare as under:-

1. That I am natural of Tika Ram Basnett.
2. That my father's actual and correct name is Tika Ram Basnett (Chettri) which has been recorded in his Sikkim Subject Certificate vide Sl.No. 112, volume no. II under block Chenjey, issued by Land Revenue Department, Government of Sikkim.
3. That inadvertently in aadhar card his name has been recorded as Tek Bahadur Chettri bearing registration no. 6817 8512 1594 issued by Unique Identification Authority of India, and also same in my Certificate of Identification.
4. That Chettri is our caste and Basnett is our sub caste.
5. That the name Tika Ram Basnett and Tek Bahadur Chettri refers and denotes to one and same person i.e. my father's only.
6. That this affidavit is made bonafide and to give the above declaration on oath.

**DEPONENT**  
**Mon Kumar Chettri.**

## Rotary's Int'l community provides masks to Lingdum monastery



**SUMMIT REPORT**  
**GANGTOK, 30 JUL:**

Rotary Club of Tutcheng, Central, Taiwan, supported by many

other Rotary Clubs of Taiwan, donated face masks to Pal Karmae Shedup Chokhorling Monastery at Lingdum, Gangtok, today.

The club donated 13 cartons containing 30,000 face masks through Rotary Club of Gangtok.

## Tornadoes spur injuries, damage in eastern Pennsylvania

Bensalem, Jul 30 (AP): At least five people were injured when severe weather struck an auto dealership, homes and other businesses in eastern Pennsylvania, authorities said.

The National Weather Service confirmed two tornadoes touched down Thursday in Bucks County, sending trees falling and debris flying. The thunderous downpour flooded streets and roadways.

I have been doing this for 34 years, I haven't seen that sort of devastation from a storm, said Bensalem Police Public Safety Director Fred Harran.

One of those tornadoes damaged the auto dealership and a mobile home park, news outlets reported.

Four people were injured at the dealership and a fifth was hurt at a nearby business, Harran told reporters in a nighttime news conference.



All injuries were considered non-life-threatening, he said.

A video posted on Twitter shows a building at the dealership collapsed, with emergency sirens abound.

Anthony Perez, an employee at the dealership, told The Courier Times of Bucks County that a weather alert sounded on his phone just before the tornado hit.

At that point, we were looking for shelter, he said. Everything was in a flash.

Harran said authori-

ties would work through the night to help people secure housing or return to their homes, restore power outages and clear the roadways, which were littered with debris after the tornadoes blew through.

We're going to have Friday morning rush hour in that area, which has a lot of traffic, Harran said.

Severe weather was a concern around the region Thursday, with the NWS issuing warnings in New Jersey and Ohio as well.



## Prepped for Disasters?

*Not always all ready. And that is a worry*

In 2016, at around this time of the year, a cliff had collapsed in Dzongu. The bhir crumbled at a safe enough distance from the nearest habitation to ensure that no casualties occurred. It was however still close and dramatic enough to be captured on smartphones and the frightening visuals and videos were circulated widely on social media. The material loss at Mantam, a habitation of around 24 homes, was substantial. The settlement was battered by the extremely violent headwinds of the landslide, suffered through the confusion of zero visibility caused by the fine-as-talc dust kicked up by the landslide and watched Rongnyu Chu, an otherwise friendly stream, turn into 3km long lake dammed up behind a nearly 300 feet high dam of debris. The debris-dammed reservoir is still there, becoming a camping site during winters and ferocious flood-threat during monsoons. Road connectivity is still snapped at this spot, the people appear to have moved on, and repairs and rehabilitation continue to consume funds in the crores. That was then. People in the region woke up on Friday to news that mountain streams like Mam Khola, which do not even receive a second glance as people zip by on the national highway, had broken their banks and left devastation in their wake. Lives were lost, machinery pulverized and a national highway's dodgy engineering exposed.

The region has traditionally been unlucky when it comes to natural disasters, but what keeps things on as even a keel as its situation would allow is the diligence of the officers it has always had. At the end of the day, no one person or set of officers can do much after a major disaster has struck. But when they make the effort and reach affected people despite obvious dangers and difficulties, they reassure them that people matter. And for a people grappling with nature at its most fearsome, such assurances go a long way. It is in a similar context that one needs to see the rush of good Samaritans who had raced to disaster-hit places with relief materials. Even if the relief was collected without checking what the affected area really required, it was the gesture that counted. And then there was also the National Disaster Response Force which was pressed into service. They were unfamiliar with the terrain, unsure of what to do since no rescue was required and their boats unlikely to navigate the debris-heavy lake at Mantam, but seeing these men in their orange overalls busy at the site was a reassuring sight for the people there since it convinced them that they were not forgotten. But all of these were for the immediate days after the disaster.

After the adrenaline has worn off and the sympathy wave ebbed, the real task of rehabilitating and adjusting should have begun in earnest. The true mettle of the officers and the authenticity of good Samaritans gets tested then. In the Mantam incident, the number of affected people is low, so rehabilitation was never very challenging, so what remains of this space can be used to discuss the importance of disaster prevention over disaster management.

For a place which has a natural disaster for every season, the region is staggeringly casual about preventive measures. It is also very poor when it comes to mitigation, and it is thanks only to its small size and conscientious officers, that the fallouts of disasters are not much worse than what is seen. When it comes to preparation, the first requirement should be area-specific list of potential threats, preventive measures to keep those threats at bay and a checklist of things to do in worst-case-scenarios. These should be worked in detail down to the ward level, but has obviously not been done at any scale, anywhere beyond documents which speak in vague generalities. These documents should be given to village elders to draft because they know the history of natural disasters in their respective areas, still remember the traditional safeguards the communities had worked into their lifestyles, and, well, will be motivated more by the greater common good than the civil-works priorities which might influence the less public spirited consultants. That is really where Sikkim's preparation for disasters needs to begin, should have begun rather.

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# Male Fertility is Declining – Studies Show That Environmental Toxins Could be a Reason

RYAN P. SMITH

THECONVERSATION.COM

In the U.S., nearly 1 in 8 couples struggles with infertility. Unfortunately, physicians like me who specialize in reproductive medicine are unable to determine the cause of male infertility around 30% to 50% of the time. There is almost nothing more disheartening than telling a couple “I don't know” or “There's nothing I can do to help.”

Upon getting this news, couple after couple asks me questions that all follow a similar line of thinking. “What about his work, his cellphone, our laptops, all these plastics? Do you think they could have contributed to this?”

What my patients are really asking me is a big question in male reproductive health: Does environmental toxicity contribute to male infertility?

MALE FERTILITY DECLINE

Infertility is defined as a couple's inability to get pregnant for one year despite regular intercourse. When this is the case, doctors evaluate both partners to determine why.

For men, the cornerstone of the fertility evaluation is semen analysis, and there are a number of ways to assess sperm. Sperm count – the total number of sperm a man produces – and sperm concentration – number of sperm per milliliter of semen – are common measures, but they aren't the best predictors of fertility. A more accurate measure looks at the total motile sperm count, which evaluates the fraction of sperm that are able to swim and move.

A wide range of factors – from obesity to hormonal imbalances to genetic diseases – can affect fertility. For many men, there are treatments that can help. But starting in the 1990s, researchers noticed a concerning trend. Even when

controlling for many of the known risk factors, male fertility appeared to have been declining for decades.

In 1992, a study found a global 50% decline in sperm counts in men over the previous 60 years. Multiple studies over subsequent years confirmed that initial finding, including a 2017 paper showing a 50% to 60% decline in sperm concentration between 1973 and 2011 in men from around the world.

These studies, though important, focused on sperm concentration or total sperm count. So in 2019, a team of researchers decided to focus on the more powerful total motile sperm count. They found that the proportion of men with a normal total motile sperm count had declined by approximately 10% over the previous 16 years.

The science is consistent: Men today produce fewer sperm than in the past, and the sperm are less healthy. The question, then, is what could be causing this decline in fertility.

ENVIRONMENTAL TOXICITY AND REPRODUCTION

Scientists have known for years that, at least in animal models, environmental toxic exposure can alter hormonal balance and throw off reproduction. Researchers can't intentionally expose human patients to harmful compounds and measure outcomes, but we can try to assess associations.

As the downward trend in male fertility emerged, I and other researchers began looking more toward chemicals in the environment for answers. This approach doesn't allow us to definitively establish which chemicals are causing the male fertility decline, but the weight of the evidence is growing.

A lot of this research focuses on endocrine disrupters, molecules that mimic the body's hormones and throw

off the fragile hormonal balance of reproduction. These include substances like phthalates – better known as plasticizers – as well as pesticides, herbicides, heavy metals, toxic gases and other synthetic materials.

Plasticizers are found in most plastics – like water bottles and food containers – and exposure is associated with negative impacts on testosterone and semen health. Herbicides and pesticides abound in the food supply and some – specifically those with synthetic organic compounds that include phosphorus – are known to negatively affect fertility.

Air pollution surrounds cities, subjecting residents to particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide and other compounds that likely contribute to abnormal sperm quality. Radiation exposure from laptops, cellphones and modems has also been associated with declining sperm counts, impaired sperm motility and abnormal sperm shape. Heavy metals such as cadmium, lead and arsenic are also present in food, water and cosmetics and are also known to harm sperm health.

Endocrine-disrupting compounds and the infertility problems they cause are taking a significant toll on human physical and emotional health. And treating these harms is costly.

THE EFFECTS OF UNREGULATED CHEMICALS

A lot of chemicals are in use today, and tracking them all is incredibly difficult. Today, more than 80,000 chemicals are registered with the National Toxicology Program. When the program was founded in 1978, 60,000 of those were grandfathered into the program with minimal information, and nearly 2,000 new chemicals are introduced each year. Many scientists believe that

the safety testing for health and environmental risks is not strong enough and that the rapid development and introduction of new chemicals challenges the ability of organizations to test long-term risks to human health.

Current U.S. national toxicology regulations follow the principle of innocent until proved guilty and are less comprehensive and restrictive than similar regulations in Europe, for example. The World Health Organization recently identified 800 compounds capable of disrupting hormones, only a small fraction of which have been tested.

A trade group, the American Chemistry Council, says on its website that manufacturers “have the regulatory certainty they need to innovate, grow, create jobs and win in the global marketplace – at the same time that public health and the environment benefit from strong risk-based protections.”

But the reality of the current regulatory system in the U.S. is that chemicals are introduced with minimal testing and taken off the market only when harm is proved. And that can take decades.

Dr. Niels Skakkebaek, the lead researcher on one of the first manuscripts on decreasing sperm counts, called the male fertility decline a “wake-up call to all of us.” My patients have provided a wake-up call for me that increased public awareness and advocacy are important to protect global reproductive health now and in the future. I'm not a toxicologist and can't identify the cause of the infertility trends I'm seeing, but as physician, I am concerned that too much of the burden of proof is falling on the human body and people who become my patients.

*[the writer is Associate Professor of Urology, University of Virginia]*

## ‘Outing’ of priest shines light on power – and partisanship – of Catholic media

PETER CAJKA

THECONVERSATION.COM

*It had all the hallmarks of a sensationalist tabloid sting.*

On July 21, 2021, an article appeared alleging that a senior U.S. priest, Monsignor Jeffrey Burrill, had used the hook-up app Grindr, with data from the app placing him at a number of gay bars. Burrill, the now former General Secretary of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, promptly resigned.

But the report was not published by an outlet that many Americans would associate with such sex “exposés.” Indeed, most would have never heard of it at all. It was The Pillar, a small newsletter founded in early 2021, that makes up just a tiny part of the Catholic media landscape in the U.S.

As a scholar of American Catholicism and culture, I take a keen interest in Catholic media. My recent book, “Follow Your Conscience: The Catholic Church and the Spirit of the Sixties,” draws upon dozens of articles in the Catholic media as primary sources for historical analysis. While many Americans may be familiar with evangelical outlets like Christianity Today or the Christian Post – not to mention the hundreds of evangelical radio stations across the nation – the Catholic media seems to have less prominence on the national stage.

But as The Pillar's reporting on Burrill shows, Catholic journalism can nonetheless be influential – and can split opinion in just the same way as media with a wider audience.

A NEWSPAPER FOR EVERY DIOCESE

The Catholic mediascape is made up of a series of publications at the local, national and global level. Almost every diocese has its own newspaper that covers local events like first communions – when a Catholic receives the Eucharist, the bread and wine transformed into Christ's body and blood, for the first time – or the construction of a new school gym.

But many Catholic readers also like to be informed on the bigger picture of Catholicism, and notably the Pope. In 2014, the Boston Globe, with the help of journalist John Allen, founded Crux to report on the Vatican for an American Catholic audience.

Catholic journalists not only report on the church itself, they aim to offer a Catholic perspective on broader American stories. That was the founding premise behind important Catholic magazines like Commonweal, founded by laypeople in 1924, and America, a monthly publication run by Jesuits in New York City.

Increasingly, like the secular media, Catholic outlets have been polarized and drawn into the culture war. They too have taken positions that divide readers and win constituents with particular worldviews. National Catholic Reporter, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council – the meeting of

the world's bishops 1962 to 1965 that introduced changes like Mass in the vernacular and a new respect for the religious liberty of members of other faiths – is a liberal outlet that cut its teeth on criticism of the Vietnam War and continues to promote social justice.

Its counterpart, the National Catholic Register, prefers the moral clarity and conservative positions offered by Popes like John Paul II and Benedict XIV, particularly on matters of gender, sexuality and politics. Its readers overlap with viewers of the Eternal Word Television Network, a network critical of the more liberal Pope Francis.

On the issue of homosexuality, Catholic media similarly expresses a variety of views. America magazine consistently features the writings of Father Jim Martin, a Jesuit priest who has encouraged the church to treat the gay community with more dignity. The periodical First Things, meanwhile, delights in offering readers searing critiques of secular modernity by Catholic conservative writers.

ETHICAL CONCERNS

Into this partisan media mix emerged The Pillar in 2021 and its recent report on Burrill. The investigation prompted ethical concerns over the use of data privacy – The Pillar's report relied on geolocation data from the Grindr app that it legally bought. There were also complaints that the reporting appeared to conflate Burrill's apparent homosexuality with the child abuse scandal in the Catholic church.

The ethics of The Pillar's article aside, the reporting does tap into a tradition of Catholic media shining a light on church issues and elevating it to national attention.

A generation ago, Catholic media reporting was crucial in helping expose the sexual abuse of children by priests.

On June 7, 1985, an article by investigative journalist Jason Berry in the National Catholic Reporter exposed not only the pedophilia of priest Gilbert Gauthé, but also the church's complicity to cover it up. Berry, a practicing Catholic who covered the case initially for a local Louisiana paper, detailed for a national readership how Gauthé had abused dozens of children in the Diocese of Lafayette starting in 1972. He charted the local hierarchy's efforts to keep the case out of the public eye and how church officials ignored reports of the abuse. Berry's article ran for several pages, replete with headlines like “PEDOPHILE PRIEST: STUDY IN INEPT CHURCH RESPONSE” and “MANY KNEW OF FATHER'S PROBLEM BUT NO-ONE STOPPED HIM.”

The national press picked up the story only after it appeared in National Catholic Reporter.

The publication of Berry's writings on Gauthé marked the beginning of a new, vigorous mode of national criticism in the Catholic press of church hierarchy for allegedly covering up sex

abuse scandals.

REPORTING ON SCANDALS

Without journalists like Jason Berry, the exposure of the clergy abuse crisis may have played along very different lines. To put it simply, it moved the interpretation of the crisis away from a “bad apple” paradigm – it which individual priests were to blame – towards a much more systemic approach which looked at a Catholic culture that facilitates abuse.

The Pillar has tried to frame its investigation of Burrill in a similar light. It implies that Burrill's use of hookup apps might further develop a culture of abuse in the church. The Pillar's article quotes moral theologian Father Thomas Berg and the late psychological and clergy sex abuse expert Richard Sipe, both of who argue that there is a connection between a cleric violating his vows of celibacy with other adults and a potential abuse of adolescents. The suggestion is that it encourages “networks of protection and tolerance among sexually active clerics,” as The Pillar suggests.

But this argument requires a fine dance that risks falling into the trap of connecting the act of homosexuality with pedophilia. Not everybody is convinced that The Pillar's article drew this line sufficiently.

Nonetheless, it has rekindled a debate over the role of Catholic media.

In his 1996 book, “Pedophiles and Priest,” historian Philip Jenkins criticizes Berry's landmark reporting for making it appear as if everyone in Louisiana Church structure, from the bishops to fellow priests, were at fault for Gauthé's prolific abuse. Jenkins argues that the June 1985 article provided a formula for future reporting: first a journalist details some rumors, then he or she writes about how the allegations troubled parents, then the reporter mentions a transfer of a priest to a new parish and, finally, the investigator quotes an expert who comments on the structural nature of the crisis. In this way, Jenkins suggested, journalists make abuse appear more pervasive than it is. Although Jenkins book was written in the mid-1990s, his analysis, while problematic, remains important.

The abuse crisis is not the only challenge the Catholic Church faces – it is currently in the midst of struggle between conservative and more progressive elements. In tying to draw a connection between Burrill's apparent homosexuality and his potential future complicity in the clergy abuse crisis, The Pillar, one of the newest entrants in the Catholic media landscape, has waded into the church's culture war and placed itself among the outlets that will be reporting on it in the months and years to come.

*[the writer is Professor of American Studies, University of Notre Dame]*



# Nepal's search for Covid vaccines continues, but no new deal in sight yet

ARJUN POUDEL

**KATHMANDU, 30 JUL [KATHMANDUPOST]:** Covid-19 vaccine doses may have been trickling in lately, but Nepal's struggle to secure additional jabs is not over yet, with Health Ministry officials saying the government is ready to grab any opportunity to procure them from any company or country willing to sell the shots.

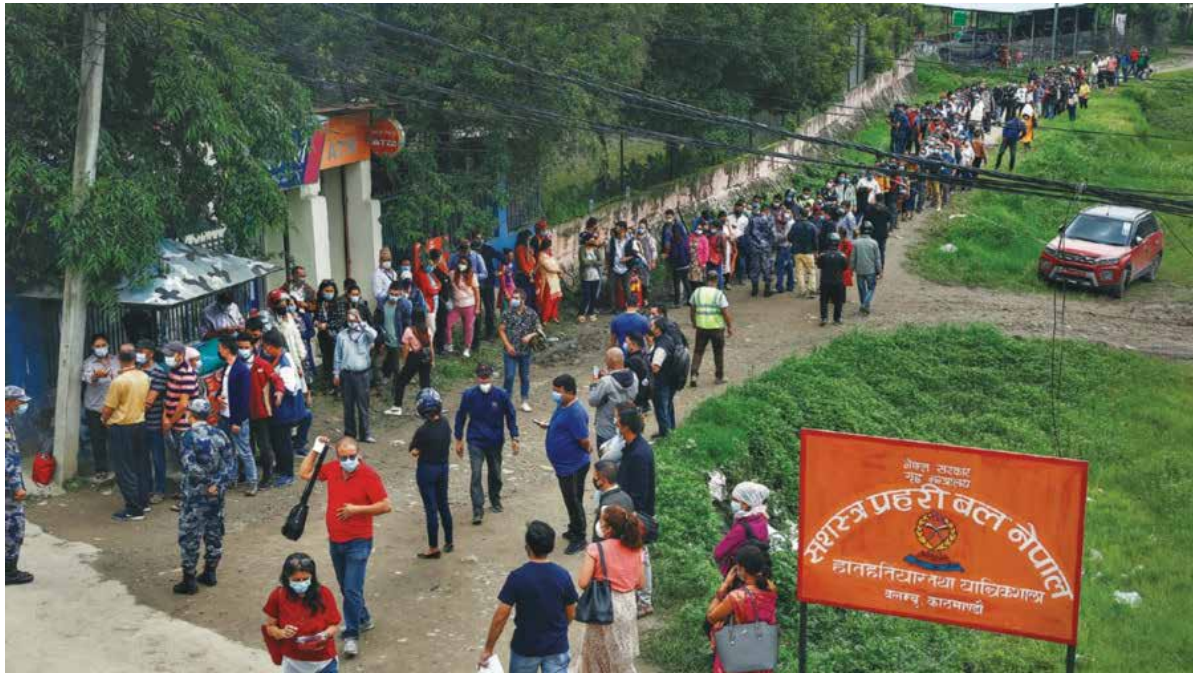
"Our efforts are on, but we have not been able to sign any new deal with any vaccine manufacturing firm or country to procure vaccines," said Dr Roshan Pokhrel, a secretary at the Ministry of Health.

Nepal so far has Covishield, the AstraZeneca type vaccine manufactured in India, Vero Cell of China's Sinopharm, and Janssen of Johnson & Johnson to inoculate its population. A majority of the doses were supplied to Nepal under grant assistance or through COVAX, an international vaccine-sharing scheme backed by the United Nations.

Officials say the government is also in talks with companies like Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech.

"There has not been any progress in buying vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech, but we are ready to pay if the company is ready to sell," Pokhrel told the Post.

Nepal had in the third week of April, through its embassy in Washington, DC, approached Johnson & Johnson and Moderna to buy 5 million and 2 million doses, respectively. But both Ameri-



can firms had expressed their inability to supply the jabs before 2022, citing supply chain constraints.

Officials say the government has been pulling out all the stops to secure vaccines but given the shortages, pre-booking orders and supply chain constraints, it has not been able to make substantial progress.

"We [the government] had sent diplomatic notes to the governments of major vaccine producing countries like India, China, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States to help facilitate vaccine procurement for us, saying we are ready to pay for the shots," said an official at the Health Ministry who did not wish to be named. "Several rounds of talks were also held with various firms, including Pfizer-BioNTech."

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine is an mRNA vaccine that is reported to be 95 percent effective at preventing

laboratory-confirmed SARS-CoV-2. The double-shot vaccine has to be administered within a gap of 21 days.

The US Food and Drug Administration has even authorised the use of Pfizer vaccine on children between 12 and 15 years.

Nepal, meanwhile, has yet to roll out any plan to inoculate children aged 14 and below. The group accounts for 28 percent of the total population.

Officials say if the government could procure Pfizer vaccines, they will be administered to those aged 12-18. At present only those above the age of 18 are being immunised against Covid-19.

According to the latest data from the Health Ministry, 55,904 children under 18 years have been infected with Covid-19 so far and 80 of them have died.

Public health experts say children should

definitely be vaccinated against Covid-19 when vaccines suitable for them are available but the immediate target groups should be those at risk, especially the elderly and people with comorbidities.

"Providing vaccines to children is a good decision but we should not forget that hundreds of thousands of people in risk groups have not been inoculated yet," Dr Shyam Raj Upreti, coordinator of the Covid-19 Vaccine Advisory Committee, told the Post. "This is the time to secure as many doses of vaccines so that authorities can inoculate the maximum number of people while prioritising those who fall within the risk group."

Few countries, which have administered the jabs to the majority of the adult populations—France, Germany, the United States and Austria—have either started or decided to provide Pfizer vaccines

to children aged 12-15.

"A lot of countries have yet to start administering Covid-19 vaccine to children but we should focus on the adult groups first," said Upreti.

As many as 1.4 million people aged 65 and above in Nepal have not received their second shots of Covishield even though they had taken their first doses more than four months ago—in the second week of March.

Officials hope to give them their booster doses once the 1.6 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine, provided by Japan through COVAX, arrive. The vaccine is expected to arrive within this week.

After launching its vaccination drive on January 27 with the 1 million doses of Covishield provided by the Indian government under grant assistance, Nepal had signed a deal with the Serum Institute of India to buy 2 million doses in

February. But the company has supplied only 1 million doses so far.

So far China has provided 1.8 million doses of Vero Cell vaccine under grant assistance. Nepal has signed a deal with Sinopharm to procure 4 million doses of Vero Cell and so far received 3.2 million doses. China has announced an additional 1.6 million doses of Vero Cell under grant assistance.

The United States on July 12 provided 1,534,850 doses of single-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine through COVAX.

The COVAX facility had first provided 348,000 doses of Covishield in March. It has committed to providing around 13 million doses, enough to inoculate 20 percent of the 30 million population.

So far, 3,650,733 people have taken the first dose of the coronavirus vaccine and 1,548,803 have been fully immunised, which is around 5.1 percent of the population.

The government has committed to providing free Covid-19 jabs to 72 percent of its population over 15.

"If the vaccine can be administered to children under 15, the government will arrange the vaccine for them also," Dr Samir Kumar Adhikari, joint spokesperson at the Health Ministry, told the Post. "The government is aware that millions of adults over 18 are yet to get vaccines and our fully vaccinated population is very low."

## 2 undertrial prisoners escape from Dhanbad jail

**DHANBAD, JUL 30 (PTI):** Two undertrial prisoners escaped from the highly-guarded Dhanbad divisional jail in Jharkhand on Friday morning, officials said.

Both of them were undergoing trial in two different cases of the POCSO Act, they said.

The prisoners fled after cutting an iron grill, jail Superintendent Ajay Kumar said.

"CCTV footage of the jail and outside the premises are being screened. District and police administrations have been informed about the incident and

police teams are raiding their hideouts," Kumar said.

On being informed about the incident, ADM (law and order) Kumar Tara Chandra and SDM Dhanbad Surendra Kumar reached the jail and inspected the spot.

The prisoners were identified as Ankit Rawani and Devi Bhuiyan, the jail superintendent said.

Ankit Rawani, a resident of the Kenduadih police station area, had been in the jail since October 2019, while Devi Bhuiyan was lodged in August 2020.

## Border clashes on rise under BJP rule in Assam, Meghalaya MP tells PM

**SHILLONG, 30 JUL [PTI]:** Amid heightened tension over boundary disputes in the Northeast, Congress MP from Meghalaya Vincent H Pala today wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, stating that interstate border clashes have "not only been on the rise of late, but have also taken a much more aggressive turn" under the BJP government in Assam.

"For reasons best known to the present BJP-led government of Assam, such conflicts have not only been on the rise, but have also taken a much more aggressive turn," he wrote.

Provocations and "aggressive posturing" at the interstate borders is perilous to healthy neighbourly relations, the three-time MP from Shillong wrote.

Seeking the Prime

Minister's intervention for establishing cordial relations between the neighbouring states, the former Union minister said, "I sincerely urge you to address this issue at the earliest. The progress of the region has long been fought for.. and it would be a matter of great regret to let that wither away."

He pointed out that the recent clashes at the Assam-Mizoram border, which claimed six lives, have once again highlighted the vulnerability of peace and stability of the region.

Mr Pala noted that barring Tripura and Manipur, all other states in the Northeast have boundary disputes with Assam.

It has also given rise to wrangles over land, forest resources as well as ethnic clashes over the years, he added.

## 3 new COVID-19 cases in Andamans, tally rises to 7,534

**PORT BLAIR, JUL 30 (PTI):** The COVID-19 tally of Andaman and Nicobar Islands rose to 7,534 on Friday as three more people tested positive for the infection, a health bulletin said.

The archipelago now has 10 active cases, while 7,395 people have recovered from the disease and 129 patients have succumbed to the infection to date.

The administration has tested over 4.38 lakh samples for COVID-19,

and inoculated over 2.92 lakh people, of whom over 92,000 have received both doses.

After a dip in fresh infections, local MP Kuldeep Rai Sharma wrote a letter to Chief Secretary Jitendra Narain on Thursday evening requesting him to reduce the quarantine period from 10 days to 3 days for people visiting Swaraj Dweep, Shaheed Dweep and Little Andaman Islands.

## Monsoon session of Nagaland assembly to start on Aug 3

**KOHIMA, JUL 30 (PTI):** A three-day monsoon session of the Nagaland assembly is scheduled to begin from August 3, where matters related to the vexed Naga political issue will be discussed. Assembly sources on Friday said that the Business Advisory Committee under the chairmanship of Speaker Sharingain Longkumer has set the provisional programme for the session which will be conducted following Covid-19 protocols.

The monsoon session will be held in the

backdrop of the recent proposal of the opposition Naga People's Front (NPF), which has 25 members in the House, to join the People's Democratic Alliance (PDA) government with a view to facilitating an early solution to the Naga peace talks.

The proposal, if accepted, will make the assembly opposition-less.

The Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP), the major ally of the PDA with 20 MLAs, is now waiting for a response to the proposal

from the BJP, its ally, which has 12 members in the House.

Nagaland BJP president Temjen Imna Along said that the saffron party has a high command and the state unit cannot make a decision on its own on the issue.

Sources said that the eighth Session of the 13th assembly will be held between August 3 and 5 with a recess on August 4.

Besides the Question Hour, the session will take up discussion

on matters of the Naga political issue and the activities carried out by the state government's Core Committee on it.

The panel was formed on June 10 with Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio as the convenor, Deputy CM Y Patton and Opposition Leader T R Zeliang as co-convenors and minister Neiba Kro-nu as the member secretary.

The Naga political issue or peace talks is one of the principal agendas on the election manifestos of every political party

in the state in all the elections for the past several years.

A separate dialogue for a solution between the central government and Naga negotiating groups has been in progress with NSCN(IM) since 1997 and the two sides have signed a Framework Agreement in August 2015.

The talks were said to have concluded in October 2019. However, in recent times, uncertainty over some issues such as allow-

ing the NSCN (IM) the right to tax businesses and the inability to make a headway over certain other lingering points has placed the solution process in jeopardy.

Assembly sources also said that the government has proposed to hold deliberations on how to revive the state's economy, which has been affected by the pandemic for the last one-and-a-half-year.

## Plea in Calcutta High Court seeks Mukul Roy's removal as Public Accounts Committee head

**KOLKATA, 30 JUL [PTI]:** A PIL seeking removal of MLA Mukul Roy from the post of Public Accounts Committee (PAC) chairperson in the West Bengal Assembly was moved before the Calcutta High Court on Friday, which the state government opposed contending that the matter is in the domain of the speaker.

The petitioner, BJP MLA Ambika Roy, claimed that the post of PAC chairman traditionally goes to an opposition member, but since Mukul Roy has joined the ruling Trinamool Congress after being elected on a saffron party ticket, he should be removed from

the post.

Appearing for the state, Advocate General Kishore Dutta opposed the prayer submitting that the speaker has the sole authority in the Assembly and it is for him to decide who was eligible for the post.

Claiming that a court cannot interfere in the decisions of a speaker when it comes to business of the House, as per Article 212 of the Constitution, Mr Dutta argued that the PIL was not maintainable and should be dismissed.

A division bench comprising Acting Chief Justice Rajesh Bindal and Justice R



Bharadwaj directed the petitioner to submit a short note stating why this PIL is maintain-

able before the court by August 4.

The state will be at liberty to file its reply to

it thereafter, and the case will be listed for hearing on August 10, the bench said.

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**SummitTIMES**



## Gone in 6 minutes: Another Olympic heartbreak for Deepika, crashes out in quarters

**TOKYO, JUL 30 (PTI):** Another Olympics, another heartbreak for India's Deepika Kumari.

The world number one archer's quest for an Olympic medal ended in heartbreak for the third time as she surrendered tamely to Korean top seed An San in straight sets in the quarterfinals here on Friday.

It was all over in six minutes.

The fancied Indian misfired three 7s in a row after drilling in as many 10s in succession to snuff out any chance of a comeback after being 0-2 down in the opening set.

An, who had a perfect opening set of 30, closed it out despite shooting in the red-circle thrice in succession (7-8-9) in second and third sets.

"I am not sure what happened. I tried hard but I could not perform to my own expectations," Deepika, who shot a pathetic four 7s from seven arrows, said after her loss at the Yumenoshima Park.

"I feel very sad, because I did well in the last two World Cups. I had high expectations but I could not start off well," she admitted.

"It was not a hard match at all, but I could not perform to my potential and she had it easy," Deepika, who lost to her in straight sets in the final of the Tokyo Test Event here two years ago, said.

Deepika's husband Atanu Das is the only Indian left in medal contention after his stunning shoot-off victory over two-time Olympic champion Oh Jin Hyek.

In his last-16 match slated on Saturday, Das will face home favourite Takaharu Furukawa, an individual silver medalist at the 2012 Olympics and a team bronze winner here.

Barring her three 10s on the trot in the opening set, there was no exceptional shooting from An, who had broken a 25-year-old Olympic record in the ranking round en route to winning two gold medals (team and mixed) in these Games.

But it was all about her Korean 'heavyweight tag' that proved to be the undoing for Deepika who came in as world number one after winning five World Cup gold medals this year.

"Rankings don't matter much in the Olympics. It happens once in four years and one bad match can cost you a medal. Every match is like a final here."

Deepika, however, said she would keep striving for an Olympic medal.

"As I'm getting old, it's getting tougher for me every day now. But archery does not stop for me. It's the only thing I do well. So I will keep trying every time."

In the 2016 Rio Olympics, she had lost in the pre-quarterfinals, while at her maiden Olympics in London, where also she had gone as a number one ranked player, she had crashed out in the opening round.

## Didn't have any strategy, just wanted to fight fearlessly: Lovlina on historic Olympic win

**TOKYO, JUL 30 (PTI):** She delivered a thoroughly clinical performance to ensure an Olympic medal on debut but Indian boxer Lovlina Borgohain (69kg) on Friday said she stepped into the ring against former world champion Nien-Chin Chen without a concrete plan as she knew just a fearless approach would be enough.

The 23-year-old Assam boxer was smiling ear-to-ear after making the semifinals but also well aware that the task is only half done.

"Isi ladki se 4 baar haar chuki hun (I had lost to her four time earlier), all I wanted to do was prove a point to myself by being fearless against her. I was just looking for revenge," she said with a wide grin in an online media interaction.

"I enjoyed myself in this bout, khul ke khela. There was no strategy, no plan. I knew her from before, the plan wasn't even needed," she added.

"In today's bout the key was that I didn't take any pressure, it would have been counter-productive. I only tried to give my 100 per cent."

The boxer, who has matched the Olympic performance of legends Vijender Singh and M C Mary Kom, will face reigning world champi-



on Busenaz Surmeneli of Turkey in the last-four stage on August 4.

"I have a few days, I will see her videos and figure out what to do with her," she said.

But she was averse to dwell too much on her struggles as she said it would be more appropriate to talk about her journey after she has actually completed her campaign, preferably with a gold medal.

"I will say even thank you to people after the final. Abhi kya bolun. Medal to bas gold hota hai, let me get that first," she said.

The Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh, who joined her during the interaction, lauded her fearless-

ness but Borgohain was candid enough to admit that she wasn't always like this.

"I was not fearless, I used to get scared but dheere, dheere dar khatam hua. I used to be scared before stepping into the ring. But now I have started believing in myself, I have stopped caring about what others say, that's how I became fearless," she said.

Meditation was also something that helped her along the way but she toned it down in the past few months as "you can't afford to have too calm a mind either in boxing."

"Meditation is something that I started focusing on in 2017, mujhe fight mein fayda hota tha," she said.

"But in the last four months, I gave up on it a little bit because boxing is a noisy sport, you can't have too cool a mind either. Otherwise it becomes difficult. Ultimately I just told myself that I have to believe in myself.

"I have to fight, even if it is with a broken limb, I have to," she explained.

Borgohain started out as a kick boxer, Muay Thai, practitioner.

"That was just for a year. It helped when I started boxing but at this stage, it has no contribution to my success right now," she said.

She had a rough build-up to the Games, including a bout of COVID-19 last year. But

the toughest part for her was to miss her mother's surgery after a kidney failure.

"I regret not being there because of training. I could give her very little time. Even today the media frenzy at my home has ensured that I have not been able to speak to my parents properly so far," she said.

A fan of Muhammad Ali and M C Mary Kom, Borgohain said, "I follow his (Ali's) footwork and long punches.

"As for Mary didi, it is an honour to be a part of the same camp, to train with her. She is an inspiration."

For the rest of her story, she said, "It is a long one, Olympic gold lene ke baad bataungi.

## Lovlina Borgohain: the kick-boxer turned boxer who likes to keep it cool

**NEW DELHI, JUL 30 (PTI):** "Wo aaram se jeetegi, koi tension nahi hai (She will win easily, no reason to worry)," the man who first spotted the boxer in kick-boxer Lovlina Borgohain had said before her historic medal-clinching win in Tokyo Olympics.

And Sports Authority of India coach Padam Boro's assertion, while talking to PTI a day before the contest, has turned out to be prophetic.

Borgohain (69kg) kept her calm to upstage former champion Nien-Chin Chen to enter the semifinals of the Tokyo Olympics, the third Indian boxer ever who will now finish on the podium at the quadrennial showpiece.

So where did the journey begin for the reticent youngster, brought up in Baro Mukhia village of Assam's Golaghat district, the home to the famous Kaziranga National Park.

For one, she had elder sisters -- Licha and Lima -- who are kick-boxers and parents who were immensely supportive of their children's sporting ambitions despite limited means.

"They backed her to the fullest, often discussed her game with me and were willing to do anything for her dreams," said Boro.

And what a dream she is living. The ever-smiling boxer is the first woman from Assam to make the Olympic boxing cut and clinch a medal as well.

The 23-year-old's victory on Friday also seemed like the beginning of a new era in Indian women's boxing.

As M C Mary Kom exited the Olympics with what seemed like a terrible case of bad luck, Borgohain rose from relative obscurity to create the biggest moment of her career.

"She seemed to have the talent and physique to make a good boxer. We merely guided her through. What stood out about her was her calm mind even at that time. She is not the sort who gets easily ruffled, tension nahi leti hai," Boro recalled.

"She is also a very disciplined kid."

It is not hard to be-

lieve that statement.

Her mother Mamoni underwent a kidney transplant last year. Borgohain visited her for a few days at that time and ended up testing positive for COVID-19 a day before she was to leave with the Olympic-qualified group for a 52-day training trip to Europe.

That exposure trip would have been crucial for her given that the pandemic had caused a shutdown all across and in India too, boxers were not allowed to spar for a while even after the camps reopened.

The fear was that the contact sport would end up causing infections among the practitioners.

It was deflating for the boxer but the government stepped in to assist Borgohain after she recovered from COVID-19, including a personalised training camp in Assam for her.

But away from her teammates, it was tough for the youngster to build up all by herself.

And it showed in the Asian Championships last month where she lost in her very first bout although the small size of the draw ensured that she still ended up with a bronze medal.

"I kept telling myself that I have to fight, that I cannot give up. But at the same time not take pressure. That would have hurt me," she said after her triumph in Tokyo while talking about the last few months.

She has also not been averse to talk about her lack of self-belief, especially after the first-round exit from the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

But meditation has helped her to stay focused.

And that control on the mind made all the difference in perhaps the biggest bout of her career in Tokyo on Friday.

"She always had a very strong counter-attacking game. And she showed that," Boro said.

The meticulous campaign has finally got her the result she dreamed of and the scream that she let out at the end of her quarterfinal win was perhaps Borgohain finally letting emotions overcome her after being the restrained fighter both inside and outside the ring.

## Khachanov advances to gold-medal match in Olympic tennis

**TOKYO, JUL 30 (AP):** Karen Khachanov is into the gold-medal match in tennis at the Tokyo Olympics.

The 25th-ranked Russian player beat Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain 6-3, 6-3 on Friday to reach the biggest final of his career.

Khachanov's opponent for gold will be either top-ranked Novak Djokovic or Alexander Zverev of Germany, who were next to play on another humid but overcast day at the Ariake Tennis Park.

Khachanov was pushed to three sets in three of his previous four matches in Tokyo but showed no signs of fatigue against Carreno Busta, who had knocked

off second-seeded Daniil Medvedev in straight sets a day earlier.

To celebrate, Khachanov launched a ball high into the air that landed on the arena's retractable roof.

Khachanov is coming off a quarterfinal appearance at Wimbledon.

Later, there's an all-Croatian gold-medal match in men's doubles featuring the top-seeded pair of Nikola Pietrangeli and Mate Pavic against Marin Cilic and Ivan Dodig.

Also, Djokovic was to play again with Serbian partner Nina Stojanovic in the mixed doubles semifinals against the Russian duo of Elena Vesnina and Aslan Karatsev.

## Doping talk rears its head after Russian swimmers win

**TOKYO, JUL 30 (AP):** After losing to Russian swimmers in two races at the Olympics, American backstroke star Ryan Murphy said Friday that doping remains a huge problem in the sport and he wonders if all his competitors are clean.

Seeming to take aim at a country that has repeatedly run afoul of doping rules, Murphy revealed his frustration after taking the silver medal behind Evgeny Rylov in the 200-meter backstroke.

That came three days after Murphy who swept the backstroke events at the 2016 Rio Games settled for a bronze in the 100 back. In that race, he touched after both Rylov and another Russian, Klimet Kolesnikov.

It is a huge mental drain on me to hear I'm swimming in a race that's probably not clean, Murphy said.

That is what it is.

But later, at a news conference with fellow medalists Rylov and third-place finisher Luke Greenbank of Britain, Murphy said he was not accusing the Russian of doping.

I need to be clear, he said.

My intention is not to make any allegations here. Congratulations to Evgeny, congratulations to Luke. They both did an incredible job. They're both very talented swim-

mers. They both train real hard and they've got great technique.

Rylov, who has long been one of the world's top backstrokers, denied being involved in any doping schemes.

I have always been for clean competition, he said through a translator. I'm tested. I fill out all the forms. I'm for clean sport. I've been devoting my whole life to this (sport).

Rylov didn't feel like he was the target of Murphy's frustration, even after beating him twice in Tokyo. The Russian is a two-time world champion in the 200 back, and he also pulled off a 100-200 sweep at the 2019 championships.

Ryan has all the right to think the way he does and say what he does, Rylov said.

He did not accuse me of anything. That's why I don't have anything against him.

Russia has been the most prominent target of the anti-doping movement after revelations that it launched a massive state-sponsored program to elude testers ahead of the 2014 Sochi Winter Games.

The country was forced to send depleted squads to the last two Olympics, and those that did compete at the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Games were referred to as OAR Olympic Athletes



From Russia.

Then, just when Russia appeared to be patching up its relationship with the rest of the world, more anomalies emerged from the files at Moscow's anti-doping lab.

Investigators from the World Anti-Doping Agency found evidence had been deleted and spurious information added, including fake messages designed to tarnish the name of WADA's star witness, former lab director Grigory Rodchenkov.

The new revelations resulted in a four-year sanction against the country, but Russia denied any wrongdoing and the penalty was cut in half by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

Most Russian athletes were allowed to compete at Tokyo, even though

they officially represent the Russian Olympic Committee not their country.

Critics have pointed out that the punishment lacks any real bite, since Russian teams are wearing full national colors. Their flag is banned and their national anthem can't be played during medal ceremonies, but they do get music from Russian composer Tchaikovsky.

Two Russian swimmers, Alexandr Kudashev and Veronika Andrusenko, were initially banned from competing in Tokyo by world governing body FINA because of evidence gathered from the Moscow lab.

But, just days before the opening ceremony, CAS cleared both swimmers to take part in the Olympics.

Andrusenko has com-

peted in four events at Tokyo, while Kudashev took part in two races. Neither won a medal.

After his victory in the 200 individual medley, China's Wang Shun was asked about the doping issue. His country's swimmers were involved in a massing doping scandal in the 1990s, and China's best-known swimmer, Sun Yang, was banned from the Tokyo Games because of a doping violation.

The Chinese are against doping, Wang said through a translator. We adopt a zero tolerance towards that. Asked if the penalties against the Russians were sufficient, Murphy said, When I'm asked a question like that, I've got like 15 different thoughts and 13 of them would get me into a lot of trouble.

I do believe there's doping in swimming, he added.

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# European economy grows 2%, ending double-dip recession

**FRANKFURT, GERMANY (AP):** Europe emerged from a double-dip recession in the second quarter with stronger than expected growth of 2.0% over the quarter before, according to official figures released Friday, as southern European economies previously hard hit by the pandemic showed surprisingly strong results.

But the economy in the 19 countries that use the euro currency still lagged pre-pandemic levels and trailed the faster recoveries in the U.S. and China, with the delta variant continuing to cast a shadow of uncertainty over the upturn.

The growth figure for the April-June quarter announced Thursday by the European Union's statistics agency Eurostat compared to a drop of 0.3% in the first quarter as the 19 countries that use the euro endured a double-dip recession after a rebound in mid-2020. The second-quarter growth figure was stronger than the 1.5% foreseen by market analysts.

Italy, which saw 128,000 pandemic deaths and a deep recession, was a major positive surprise, growing 2.7% as consumer spending revived. Portugal boomed with 4.9%. Meanwhile growth returned in major economies France, which grew 0.9% compared to the previous quarter, and Germany, which saw



growth of 1.5% after a sharp drop of 2.1% in the first quarter. German auto companies in particular have shown strong profits despite a shortage of semiconductor components as global auto markets recover, particularly for the higher-priced vehicles sold by Mercedes-Benz and by Volkswagen's Audi and Porsche luxury brands.

Yet the recovery lags the one in the U.S., where the economy surpassed its pre-pandemic level during the quarter. Friday's figures leave the eurozone 3% smaller than before the virus outbreak, according to Capital Economics. China was the only major economy to continue growing

during pandemic year 2020.

The stronger performance in southern Europe may be the result of stronger spending by households as restrictions are eased, said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics. Spain, with growth of 2.8% and consumer spending up 6.6%, both illustrated the rebound and underlined how far it has to go. Gross domestic product remains 6.8% below where it was before the pandemic.

Lagging vaccinations held back the European economy in the first part of the year but have made steady progress since. Yet the spread of

the more-contagious delta variant has led to predictions that it may slow, though not derail, the economic upturn. Travel and tourism, key for places like Spain and Greece, are recovering but remain subdued.

"Given its reliance on tourism, the Spanish economy looks especially vulnerable to the delta variant that is forcing several regions in the country to impose new restrictions, while foreign governments are discouraging trips to the Iberian Peninsula," said Edoardo Campanella, economist at UniCredit Bank in Milan.

Officials figures Friday also showed eurozone unemployment at

7.7% in June, down from 8.0% in May. Inflation rose to 2.2% in July from 1.9% in June.

The eurozone economy has been sustained by government spending on pandemic relief including subsidies for companies that keep furloughed workers on the payroll. The European Central Bank is adding monetary support by keeping interest rate benchmarks at record lows and by purchasing 1.85 trillion euros (\$2.2 trillion) in government and corporate bonds through at least March 2022. That step drives down longer-term borrowing rates and helps keep credit flowing to businesses and govern-

ments.

## Philippine leader recalls decision to void US security pact



**MANILA, JUL 30 (AP):** Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte has retracted a decision to end a key defence pact with the United States, allowing large-scale combat exercises between US and Philippine forces that at times have alarmed China to proceed.

Duterte's decision was announced Friday by Defence Secretary Delfin Lorenzana in a joint news conference with visiting US counterpart Lloyd Austin in Manila. It was a step back from the Philippine leader's stunning vow early in his term to distance himself from Washington as he tried to rebuild frayed ties with China over territorial rifts in the South China Sea.

The president decided to recall or retract the termination letter for the VFA, Lorenzana told reporters after an hour-long meeting with Austin, referring to the Visiting Forces Agreement.

There is no termination letter pending and we are back on track.

Austin thanked Duterte for the decision, which he said would further bolster the two nations' 70-year treaty alliance.

Our countries face a range of challenges, from the climate crises to the pandemic and, as we do, a strong, resilient US-Philippine alliance will remain vital to the security, stability and prosperity of the In-

do-Pacific, Austin said.

A fully restored VFA will help us achieve that goal together.

Terminating the pact would have been a major blow to America's oldest alliance in Asia, as Washington squares with Beijing on a range of issues, including trade, human rights and China's behaviour in the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety.

The US military presence in the region is seen as a counterbalance to China, which has used force to assert claims to vast areas of the disputed South China Sea, including the construction of artificial islands equipped with airstrips and military installations.

China has ignored a 2016 international arbitration ruling that invalidated its historic basis.

China, the Philippines, Vietnam and three other governments have been locked in the territorial standoff for decades. The U.S. doesn't take sides and insists on freedom of navigation in international waters, and doesn't recognize China's claims.

In a speech in Singapore on Tuesday, Austin said that Beijing's claim to the South China Sea has no basis in international law and treads on the sovereignty of states in the region. He said the U.S. supports the re-

gion's coastal states in upholding their rights under international law, and is committed to its defense treaty obligations with Japan and the Philippines.

Duterte notified the U.S. government in February 2020 year that the Philippines intended to abrogate the 1998 agreement, which allows large numbers of American forces to join combat training with Philippine troops and sets legal terms for their temporary stay.

US and Philippine forces engage in about 300 activities each year, including the Balikatan, or shoulder-to-shoulder, exercises, which involve thousands of troops in land, sea and air drills that often included live-fire exercises. They've often sparked China's concerns when they were held on the periphery of the sea Beijing claims as its own.

The pact's termination would have taken effect after 180 days, but Duterte has repeatedly delayed the decision. While it was pending, the US and Philippine militaries proceeded with plans for combat and disaster-response exercises but canceled larger drills last year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The Balikatan exercises resumed last April but were considerably scaled down due to continuing COVID-19 outbreaks and lockdowns.

## Hong Kong protester given 9-year term in 1st security case

**HONG KONG, JUL 30 (AP):** A pro-democracy protester was sentenced Friday to nine years in prison in the closely watched first prosecution under Hong Kong's national security law as the ruling Communist Party tightens control over the territory.

Tong Ying-kit, 24, was convicted of inciting secession and terrorism for driving his motorcycle into a group of police officers at a July 1, 2020, rally. He carried a flag bearing the banned slogan, "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times".

President Xi Jinping's government imposed the law on the former British colony last year following protests that erupted in mid-2019. Beijing has rolled back the territory's Western-style civil liberties and tried to crush a pro-democracy movement by jailing activists. The public's role in picking Hong Kong's legislators has been reduced.

Critics accuse Beijing of violating the autonomy promised when Hong Kong returned to China in 1997 and wrecking its status as a global business centre. Human rights activists say the security law is being abused to attack legitimate dissent.

Tong's sentence was longer than the three years requested by the prosecution. He faced a

possible maximum of life in prison.

Tong's sentence is a hammer blow to free speech and shows the law is a tool to instill terror in government critics, Amnesty International's Asia-Pacific regional director, Yamini Mishra, said in a statement.

The law lacks any exemption for legitimate expression or protest, Mishra said. "The judgment at no point considered Tong's rights to freedom of expression and protest.

Chinese officials reject the criticism and say Beijing is restoring order and instituting security protections like those of other countries. More than 100 people have been arrested under the security law.

Defence lawyers said Tong's penalty should be light because the court hadn't found the attack was deliberate, no one was injured and the secession-related offence qualified as minor under the law.

Tong nodded but said nothing after Judge Esther Toh announced the sentence for a three-judge panel in the Hong Kong High Court. The former restaurant waiter wore a black shirt and tie with a blue blazer as he had throughout his trial.

As Tong was led out of the courtroom, spectators yelled, We will wait for you!

After the court ad-

judged, a spectator yelled to lead defence lawyer Clive Grossman, Mr Grossman, appeal! Another lawyer, Lawrence Lau, said Tong expressed thanks to the Hong Kong public for their support.

The judges convicted Tong on Tuesday, ruling his actions were aimed at intimidating the government and public. It said carrying the flag was an act of incitement to secession, rejecting defence arguments that Tong couldn't be proven to be inciting secession just by using the slogan.

Tong was sentenced to eight years for incitement to secession and 6 1/2 years for terrorism, with some time to be served concurrently for a total of nine years, said Toh, the judge.

Tong expressed remorse but that didn't count toward reducing his sentence because he failed to plead guilty, the judges said in a written ruling. They said he had good character and no criminal record but due to the serious offences those would not mitigate the penalty.

The sentence reflects the abhorrence of society, the ruling said.

Tong's trial was conducted without a jury under rules that allow an exception to Hong Kong's British-style common law system if state secrets need to be protected or foreign forces are involved. The judges were picked by Hong Kong Chief

Executive Carrie Lam.

The protests began over an extradition law proposed by Lam's government and expanded to include other grievances and demands for more democracy. At their height, thousands of people held marches and rallies every weekend.

The last pro-democracy Hong Kong newspaper, Apple Daily, shut down last month after journalists and executives were arrested. Its owner, Jimmy Lai, is serving a 20-month prison term and faces charges of colluding with foreigners to endanger national security.

Also last year, Hong Kong's Legislative Council was rearranged to guarantee a majority to Beijing-allied figures. Rules for elected officials were tightened to require them to be deemed patriotic. Last November, the remaining 15 pro-democracy legislators resigned after four were expelled for urging foreign governments to impose sanctions on China and Hong Kong over Beijing's crackdown.

The US stopped treating Hong Kong as a separate territory for trade, citing its reduced autonomy. Washington imposed travel and financial sanctions on leaders of China's ceremonial legislature. Canada, Australia and other governments suspended extradition treaties with the territory due to the security law.

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## ‘Fleabag’ actor Ben Aldridge joins film adaptation of Michael Ausiello memoir ‘

LOS ANGELES, JUL 30 (PTI): Actor Ben Aldridge, best known for starring in shows “Pennyworth” and “Fleabag”, has been roped in to play a pivotal part in Focus Features’ upcoming movie adaptation of author Michael Ausiello’s 2017 bestselling memoir “Spoiler Alert: The Hero Dies.”

According to Deadline, “Spoiler Alert” features actor Jim Parsons in the role of Ausiello, with Aldridge essaying the role of his partner Kit Cowan.

“The Big Sick” helmer Michael Showalter will direct the tragicomic love story.

The book focuses on the emotional maelstrom into which Ausiello’s relationship was plunged, in the 11 months that took Cowan from his diagnosis with terminal cancer to his passing.

The memoir weaves in the roller-coaster ride that was the couple’s 14-year romance.

David Marshall Grant, Dan Savage and Ausiello have penned the script.

The moment I finished Michael Ausiello’s incredible book, I knew Focus needed to make this film. We fell head over heels in love with Michael and Kit, and their classic New York romance, and we can’t wait to see what Jim and Ben breathe into the roles.



“With Showalter’s vision for the story’s heart and humor, we hope not only to do justice to Michael and Kit’s story but also to inspire the audience to love them as much as we do,” Kiska Higgs, Focus Features’ president of production and acquisitions, said in a statement.

Showalter is producing the film with Jordana Mollick via their Semi-Formal Productions, along with Parsons, Todd Spiwak and Alison Mo Massey of That’s Wonderful Productions banner.

The production is set to start somewhere around October-November in New York City.

The Big Pic



**DOG DAYS!** The actor, Hugh Jackman is spotted taking a walk with his two adorable pups on the streets of NYC.

## ‘Sweet Tooth’ returning with season two on Netflix

LOS ANGELES, JUL 30 (PTI):

Live-action drama series “Sweet Tooth” has been renewed for second season at Netflix.

Produced by Hollywood star Robert Downey Jr’s banner Team Downey in association with Warner Bros Television, the show is based on the DC comic book series by Jeff Lemire.

In a press release, Netflix said that the sophomore season will consist of eight one-hour episodes.

“It’s been equally thrilling and heartwarming to experience how people around the world have been falling in love with our deer-boy, showrunner Jim Mickle said in a statement.

“We couldn’t be more excited to continue our collaboration with Netflix and keep following Gus and his friends on their extraordinary journey,” he added.

The series, which debuted on Netflix in June this year, takes place ten years after “The Great Crumble” wreaked havoc on the world and led to the mysterious emergence



of hybrids -- babies born part human, part animal.

“Unsure if hybrids are the cause or result of the virus, many humans fear and hunt them. After a decade of living safely in his secluded forest home, a sheltered hybrid deer-boy named Gus (Christian Convery) unexpectedly befriends a wandering loner named Jepperd (Nonso

Anozie).

“Together they set out on an extraordinary adventure across what’s left of America in search of answers about Gus’ origins, Jepperd’s past, and the true meaning of home,” the official logline read.

“Sweet Tooth” also stars Adeel Akhtar as Dr Singh, Will Forte as Richard, Stefa-

nia LaVie Owen as Bear, Dania Ramirez as Aimee Eden, Aliza Vellani as Rani Singh and Neil Sandilands as General Abbot with veteran actor James Brolin as the voice of the narrator.

The show will be executive produced by Downey Jr and his wife Susan Downey along with Amanda Burrell, Linda Moran and Mickle.

## Johansson sues Disney for breach of contract over ‘Black Widow’ release, studio fires back



LOS ANGELES, JUL 30 (PTI): Hollywood star Scarlett Johansson has sued Disney Studios for breach of contract over their decision to release Marvel Studios’ “Black Widow” standalone film on Disney Plus and in theatres simultaneously.

“Black Widow”, featuring Johansson as the titular superhero, released in the theatres and on Disney’s streaming platform on July 9.

The film set a pandemic-era box office record with its 80 million debut in North America and earned 78 million overseas. It also made 60 million on Disney Plus.

According to Deadline, in a lawsuit filed on Thursday in Los Angeles Superior Court, attorneys for Johansson claimed that the star’s contract was breached when the studio opted not to

debut the film exclusively in theatres.

The lawsuit contends that the Disney Plus release siphoned potential theatregoers, costing her potential compensation tied to the movie’s theatrical revenue.

Disney intentionally induced Marvel’s breach of the agreement, without justification, in order to prevent Ms. Johansson from realizing the full benefit of her bargain with Marvel, the suit reads.

The suit seeks unspecified damages and names the Walt Disney Company as the sole defendant.

The Walt Disney Co. responded to Johansson’s lawsuit via statement in which the studio said that the litigation showed a callous disregard to the

COVID-19 pandemic and even revealed that she has so far received USD 20 million from the project.

There is no merit whatsoever to this filing. The lawsuit is especially sad and distressing in its callous disregard for the horrific and prolonged global effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

“Disney has fully complied with Ms Johansson’s contract and furthermore, the release of ‘Black Widow’ on Disney+ with Premier Access has significantly enhanced her ability to earn additional compensation on top of the 20M she has received to date,” a Disney spokesperson said.

Directed by Cate Shortland, “Black Widow” also features actors Rachel Weisz, David Harbour and Florence Pugh.

### ARIES:

Your self-esteem may be challenged today by a fast talker or unpleasant situation, Aries. Don’t accept things at first glance. There’s a much deeper meaning brewing below the surface, and you’d be foolish not to recognize that. Stick to your guns and stay grounded. Newfangled devices and big promises may not be all they’re advertised to be.

### TAURUS:

Jump on board the fast train and see how far it takes you, Taurus. You’ll be surprised at how far you can go with minimal effort. Your grace and polite social mannerisms will help you navigate quickly to where you need to be. You have the wind at your back today. Make the most of this energy by aiming for the top and not resting until you get there.

### GEMINI:

Flexibility is an important part of today, Gemini. Take a relaxed, laid-back approach. Trying to ram your ideas through isn’t the best tactic. Having tunnel vision will restrict you in many ways. Keep an open mind and be receptive to others’ ideas and opinions. You have a lot of power readily available. It would be a shame to waste it by lacking the breadth of vision to see all your options.

### CANCER:

Things coming at you from all sides are forcing you to make a move, Cancer. Don’t be pressured into something you don’t want to do. A nervous restlessness may urge you to act. Don’t let other people boss you around. Secure your position and be strong. Try not to be tempted into situations that you know are going to be bad for you.

### LEO:

Lock into the practical, grounding force of the day that is not only realistic but also flexible. Attend to details and organize yourself, Leo. Be aware that you may need to alter your course a bit in order to fit the group dynamic. Try to work with those around you to achieve a common goal. Initiating the help of others is easier than you think as long as you stay focused and motivated.

### VIRGO:

Today is one of those days in which prosperity is much closer than you think, Virgo. You may know what you seek, but it’s up to you to take the first step toward going after it. You’re probably looking for solid answers to your deep, probing questions. Don’t let your inquisitive mind rest until you find answers that ring true for you.

### LIBRA:

Indecision may leave you helpless at a crossroads today, Libra. Others may be just as undecided regarding which way to go. At the same time, you may feel pressured to take immediate action, and you’re tired of waiting for others to make the first move. Find the answers in simple solutions. There’s more than one correct way. Your choice is always the right one if you believe it to be so.

### SCORPIO:

Latch on to the expansiveness that comes when you connect with others in a social arena, Scorpio. Communication is a key aspect of the day. If you go with the flow you will land exactly where you need to be. Take the adventurous route and skip around from one thing to another. There’s no need to pin yourself down to one route or way of doing things.

### SAGITTARIUS:

Connect with the stable, grounding energy of the day, Sagittarius, but beware that tension may come in the form of fast talk and misinformation. People could be fickle and frantic. Wait for the dust to settle before you pick a road to travel. Impulsive decisions may lead you down paths that aren’t the best choice for you now. Relax and try not to think about it too much!

### CAPRICORN:

Any expansive feeling you experience may be rained on today. You could get the feeling that you’ve lost touch with reality. Make sure you connect with real life, Capricorn, and do a bit of planning to balance your whimsical side. Things that you haven’t accounted for might crop up to serve as a reminder that you need to deal with real life.

### AQUARIUS:

Walk to the beat of your own drum, Aquarius. If you try to latch on to the smooth-talking, fast-paced information of the day, your voice could get lost in the crowd. But if you plant your feet firmly and try to plan, you might deprive yourself of spontaneous events that prove the most fulfilling. Chart your own course and don’t be afraid if no one else follows along

### PISCES:

Connect with the fellow sitting next to you or perhaps the woman behind you in line at the store. He or she could share a piece of wisdom that changes your life forever. Be aware that you also could be that person who changes someone else’s life with a single thought or slice of wisdom that you’ve picked up in your travels. Communication is the key to expanding your world in many ways