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Summit TIMES

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ON TOP OF THE NEWS

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Sikkim appears to be turning the corner on second wave

...COMPLETES FIVE DAYS WITH NEARLY THREE-TIMES MORE RECOVERIES THAN NEW CASES

SUMMIT REPORT

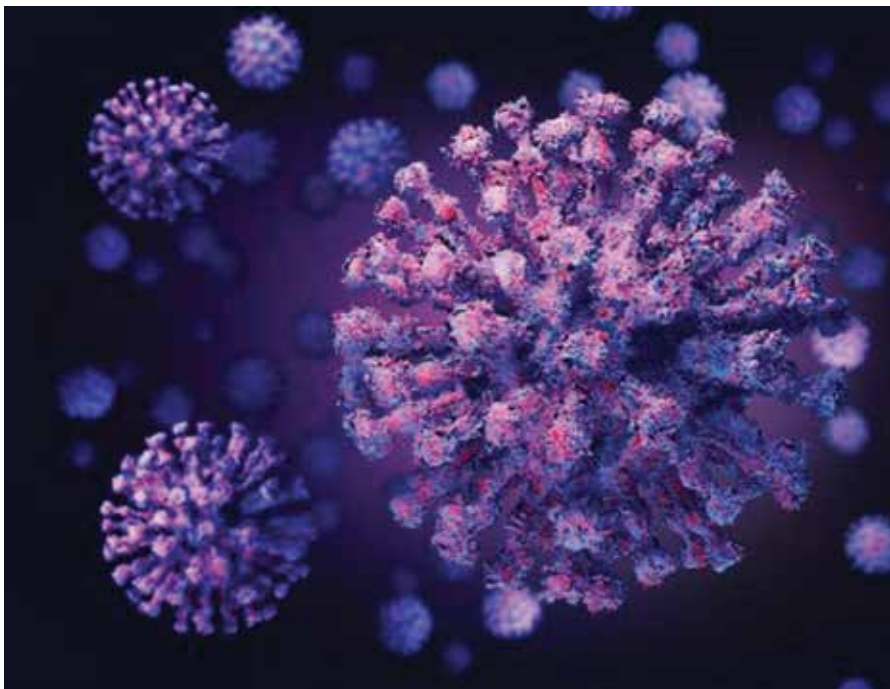
GANGTOK, 10 AUG:

Sikkim's tally of confirmed cases of COVID-19 crossed the 28,000-mark today to reach 28,018 with 110 new cases reported in the last 24 hours.

These 110 cases were reported from the testing of 1,036 samples on Monday giving Sikkim a daily test positivity rate of 10.6%.

Today was also the fifth consecutive day that the number of Covid recoveries was significantly higher than the number of new cases.

As per the Daily Report of COVID-19 in Sikkim released by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme of the Health Department at 8AM this morning, against the 110 new cases, the State recorded the discharge of 273 more



formerly Covid positive people from home and facility isolation after making full recoveries. With this, the number of recovered cases of COVID-19 in Sikkim has gone up to 24,817.

The past five days have given Sikkim some reason to hope in as far as turning the curve on the second wave is concerned. While a total of 492 new cases were detected over the past five

days, there were nearly three-times more recoveries over the same period at 1,290. Unfortunately, there were also five deaths over these five days, but that is still lower than the numbers

Sikkim recorded even over the recent weeks.

Unfortunately, Sikkim today also ended its two-day run of no new Covid deaths and the virus claimed a life at STNM Hospital in the past 24 hours taking the state's Covid toll to 356.

Of the 110 new cases, 83 were picked up in rapid antigen testing of 683 samples and 27 in RT-PCR testing of 351 samples. Of the new cases, 51 cases were registered in East District, 37 in West District and 22 in South District.

Sikkim currently has 2,567, active Covid cases at present, only 108 of whom are in hospital and the rest recovering under home or facility isolation. Of those in hospital, 14 were admitted in the past 24 hours and there are five Covid-positive patients currently in ICU.

CM discusses road connectivity issues with Union Transport Minister



SUMMIT REPORT

NEW DELHI, 10 AUG:

Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang called on the Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari, at Transport Bhawan, New Delhi, today, a press release informs.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister expressed his gratitude for all the support extended towards the development of Sikkim and apprised the Union Minister about the road network in the state.

Further, he stated that Sikkim, being a mountainous region, requires good road connectivity to develop far-flung areas which will also be useful in terms of national security.

In this regard, the Chief Minister submitted a proposal mentioning the construction and repair of several highways, bridges, drainage and restoration of roads damaged by the monsoon throughout Sikkim.

The Union Minister

assured to look into the matter and stated that projects related to roads will be included in Bharatmala Pariyojana and also assured to look into the matter of roads damaged by the monsoon. He further asked the Chief Minister to send a proposal including ropeway projects in Sikkim.

Minister Samdup Lepcha, Secretary to CM and other officials of the State Government were present during the meeting.

States can't withdraw criminal cases against legislators: Supreme Court

NEW DELHI, 19 AUG [NDTV]: The state governments cannot withdraw pending criminal cases against MPs and MLAs without the approval of the high courts, the Supreme Court said today, adding that a special bench will soon be constituted to monitor the progress of such cases against the legislators.

The special courts judges, hearing cases against the MPs and MLAs, will not be transferred until further orders, a three-judge bench, headed by Chief Justice NV Ramana, said. Justices Vineet Saran and Surya Kant are other members on the bench.

It directed the Registrar Generals of all the high courts to provide information, in a particular format, about the cases decided by special courts against the lawmakers. It has also sought the details of pending cases and their stages before the trial courts.

The top court was hearing a PIL from 2016 filed by lawyer and BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay on fast-tracking of criminal trials against lawmakers. The plea also sought a life ban on convicted politicians from contesting polls.

Senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, assisting the court as Amicus Curiae, informed that Uttar Pradesh seeks to withdraw 76 cases against BJP MLAs, including those accused in Muzaffarnagar riot cases. In Karnataka, the state government is seeking to withdraw 61 cases against legislators. Maharashtra and Uttarakhand are also seeking to withdraw cases against legislators.

The CBI came in for sharp criticism from the Supreme Court for not filing status report on pending cases against legislators.

"It seems the government is not concerned with this issue. The CBI is reluctant to file status reports. If you (Centre) are reluctant to file status reports how can we presume you are concerned with cases against MP/MLAs," Chief Justice Ramana said. The premier investigating agency has been asked to file a status report within 10 days. The CJI also said that the Enforcement Directorate status report also does not have much information.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the centre and CBI, told the top court that government is committed to speed up cases against legislators and there was some issues at his end and requested for last opportunity to file status report on behalf of the CBI.

The bench said the case has been pending for a long time and despite several adjournments CBI is yet to file its report.

CM calls on Finance Minister to okay Cess on pharma and hydel produce



NEW DELHI, 10 AUG [IPR]:

Chief Minister, Prem Singh Tamang called on the Union Minister, Finance and Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman at Parliament House, New Delhi, today.

During the meeting, the Chief Minister expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to place the proposal about imposing cess on the output of Pharma products produced within the boundaries of Sikkim and on each unit of hydropower generated. He added that through these proposals the state government has envisaged striking a

balance between the tax where it originates and tax where it accrues.

Referring to the proposal to the Group of Ministers (GOM) of the GST council, he stated that though they have been very considerate towards the fiscal stress of Sikkim and the need for additional resources, they do not specifically mention the proposal of levy of cess.

In this regard, the Chief Minister submitted a proposal and requested that the Centre impose a cess on the organised manufacturing output produced in Sikkim and assign it to the state.

Similarly, the Chief Minister also requested the Government of India to examine the request of the state government to provide a special package of assistance to tide over the financial stress caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

As suggested by the GOM regarding the special package, he stated that the state government has prepared a first support proposal and a road map in the report for revival of Sikkim's economy. The Union Minister agreed to support the state through a special package to fill the gaps of the GST and similar taxes which has decreased due to the pandemic.

The Chief Minister thanked the Union Minister for her assurance to assist in economic and infrastructural development of the state.

Industries Minister, BS Panth, ACS (Finance), Secretary to CM and Resident Commissioner were also present during the meeting.

Petrol, diesel prices unchanged for 24th straight day

NEW DELHI, 10 AUG [NDTV]:

Petrol and diesel prices remained unchanged across the four metro cities for the 24th consecutive day on Tuesday, August 10, 2021.

In the national capital, petrol prices were steady at 101.84 per litre and diesel rates were unchanged at 89.87 per litre, according to the Indian Oil Corporation.

In Mumbai, petrol prices stood at 107.83 per litre and diesel is retailed at Rs 97.45 per litre. (Also Read: How To Check Latest Petrol And Diesel Rates In Your City).

Among the four metro cities, petrol and diesel prices are the highest in Mumbai, according to the state-run oil refiner. Fuel rates vary across the states due to value-

added tax (VAT).

State-run oil refiners such as Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum revise fuel rates on a daily basis, considering the crude oil prices in international markets and the rupee-dollar exchange rates. Any changes in petrol, diesel prices are implemented with effect from 6 am each day.

SDF to mark Int'l Youth Day with daylong webinar



SAGAR CHETTRI

GANGTOK, 10 AUG:

Sikkim Democratic Front is celebrating International Youth Day 2021 on the theme 'Youth Envisioning a Different Future in Times of COVID-19' on Thursday. On the occasion, Youth Front of SDF party is organising a day-long webinar through the Zoom platform and on the party's official Facebook page.

International Youth Day is observed every year on 12 August and this year's theme is 'Transforming Food Systems: Youth Innovation for Human and Planetary Health'.

Addressing a press conference here this afternoon, SDF student's wing in-charge, Komal Chamling mentioned that after consultation with senior members and youth, the party has chosen a new theme for the celebration in the state as this year's theme was not thought to be relevant in Sikkim's context.

SDF has decided to

celebrate International Youth Day 2021 on the theme 'Youth Envisioning a Different Future in Times of COVID-19'.

She added that this theme was chosen as the youth have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in the education sector. She added that the COVID-19 pandemic crisis is creating a new world and the youth are going to inherit a transformed world so there are lots of challenges ahead.

Ms Chamling stated that the main purpose of the celebration is to highlight relevant issues of Sikkimese youths and to create a platform for constructive dialogue and discussion to bring out fruitful outcomes. She appealed to the youth to connect with the programme; give ideas and viewpoints.

Speaking about the day-long programme, she informed that it would be completely online due to the pandemic. The webinar has been divided into

two sessions.

The first session of the webinar will be held from 10 AM to 12:30 PM and would be flagged off by SDF spokesperson and youth wing in-charge, MK Subba, who will highlight youth-related issues followed by brief speeches by four selected youths on education, economy, climate change and youths & politics.

The first half will also have performances by three groups of hip-hop artists based on the issues related to the youth while another highlight of the first session would be a debate competition for students on the topic 'Youth in Sikkim are Able to Exercise Freedom of Expression'.

The second session, from 1:30 to 4 PM, will have a panel discussion on Education & COVID-19 having two speakers from Sikkim and two from Pune and a moderator from Sikkim and another moderator from Shillong.

turn to pg02

India records lowest daily count in 147 days

NEW DELHI, AUG 10 (PTI): India logged 28,204 new coronavirus infections, the lowest in 147 days, taking the total tally of cases to 3,19,98,158, while the active cases fell to 3,88,508, the lowest in 139 days, according to the Union Health Ministry data updated on Tuesday.

The national COVID-19 recovery rate has increased to 97.45 per cent, which is the highest ever recovery rate achieved, the ministry said.

The death toll has climbed to 4,28,682 with 373 fresh fatalities, the data updated at 8 am showed.

The active cases comprise 1.21 per cent of the total infections, the lowest since March 2020, the ministry said.

A decrease of 13,680 cases has been recorded in the active COVID-19 caseload in a span of 24 hours.

As many as 15,11,313 tests were conducted on Monday taking the total cumulative tests conducted so far for detection of COVID-19 in the country to 48,32,78,545.

The daily positivity rate has declined to 1.87 per cent. It has been less than three per cent for the last 15 days, the ministry said, adding the weekly positivity rate was recorded at 2.36 per cent.

The number of people who have recuperated from the disease surged to 3,11,80,968, while the case fatality rate stands at 1.34 per cent, the data stated.

Cumulatively, 51.45 crore COVID-19 vaccine doses have been administered under the nationwide vaccination drive till Tuesday morning.

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

The 373 new fatalities include 105 from Kerala and 68 from Maharashtra.

A total of 4,28,682 deaths have been reported so far in the country including 1,34,064 from Maharashtra, 36,817 from Karnataka, 34,340 from Tamil Nadu, 25,067 from Delhi, 22,774 from Uttar Pradesh, 18,240 from West Bengal and 17,852 from Kerala.

The ministry stressed that more than 70 per cent of the deaths occurred due to comorbidities.

"Our figures are being reconciled with the Indian Council of Medical Research," the ministry said on its website, adding that state-wise distribution of figures is subject to further verification and reconciliation.

Soreng convenes meeting on I-Day celebration



SORENG, 10 AUG (IPR): A Sub-Division coordination and preparation meeting chaired by the SDM (Soreng), Ranjan Rai with regard to the 75th Independence Day Celebration was held at the Conference Hall of the Sub-Divisional Administrative Centre today.

The meeting had the presence of SDPO (Soreng), Mahendra Pradhan, BDO (Soreng),

Sabina Limbo, BDO (Chumbung), Kailash Gurung, RO/AD (Soreng), BB Rai and Officials from other respective departments.

Addressing the meeting, the SDM (Soreng) emphasized that the celebration this year will adhere to a small number of participation and audience while following the norms and guidelines of the existing Covid-19

protocols issued by the State Government.

In the meeting, the roles and responsibilities of the Officials from respective departments were extensively discussed. He urged all the members present to work actively and in coordination with the line department in order to ensure a safe and successful celebratory event. The Administration

has also decided to felicitate the Head of Office of the Covid-19 frontline workers from all concerned departments for their rigorous and relentless efforts during the pandemic.

Also, an essay, painting and poem competition for both private and government school students under Soreng Sub-Division will be held, it was decided.

India must take strong, bold steps to mitigate climate crisis: Experts

NEW DELHI, 10 AUG (PTI): India must act now or else, the stronger effects of climate change will continue, environmental experts said on Tuesday, calling for the country to focus on a rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and building resilient infrastructure to tackle the increasing impacts of extreme weather events, as warned in the latest IPCC report.

The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), approved by the 195 member countries, cautioned that every region on earth will witness the worst irreversible effects of climate change in the coming years, including sea-level rise and a surge in heat waves, rainfall and floods.

In a written response to PTI, Krishna Achuta Rao, one of the authors of the report, said the stronger effects of climate change will continue till the time the emissions are zeroed out.

"The corrective steps to prevent further climate change are the same for India and the rest of the world -- to reduce emissions of GHGs, especially carbon-dioxide, and reduce them rapidly. There are hard decisions to be taken to achieve this.

"The message is also clear that we are already experiencing the effects of climate change and will continue to experience stronger effects till such time the emissions are zeroed out, which means that we have to pay attention to how we adapt to these changes so the worst effects of climate change on our population, economy and infrastructure are minimised," Rao said.

Sharing a similar view, S Panwar, Director, Climate Change and Energy Programme, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF India), said with the increase in global warming, devastating consequences of delayed climate action can be seen across the world. "India is one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change and will be significantly impacted due to the increase in frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as floods, cyclones, heat waves, forest fires and droughts.

"Since the window of action has narrowed down further, India needs to mainstream climate action, accelerate adaptation efforts across sectors and build resilience capacity," he said, adding that the country should also keep up its efforts towards sustainable development and embrace innovative solutions that reduce GHG emissions.

Calling for strong and bold steps, Avinash Chanchal, Senior Climate Campaigner, Greenpeace India, said the country needs to take urgent measures to limit temperature rise below 1.5 degrees Celsius and move away from any future investment into fossil fuels.

"India has already taken a few progressive steps like the ambitious target

of clean energy can indeed contribute to tackle the climate crisis. But it also needs to move away from opening future investment into fossil fuels," he said.

Noting that the report provides enough information about how human activities are causing climate change, making heat waves, droughts and heavy rainfall more frequent and severe, Chanchal said India is one of the most vulnerable countries for these extreme climatic events.

"We are already witnessing these events at regular intervals. This human-made climate change is not only impacting nature and our biodiversity, but it has a huge impact on human health and the economy as well. The coastal areas are already dealing with the effects of sea-level rise, which will only increase if we fail to solve the problem of increasing temperatures," he said, adding that governments and big corporations must shift to cheaper and cleaner energy sources.

"Governments and big corporations must understand that development cannot continue on dead (fossil) fuels anymore, especially when science has already brought sustainable alternatives to our doorstep. With a cheaper clean energy source, we can certainly get 100 per cent renewable energy in the transport, electricity and industry sectors," he said.

"As far as India is concerned, we have a double burden now. We have to build resilience in our economy, infrastructure and social systems to deal with the increasing impacts of extreme weather events. At the same time, we have to act on mitigation measures," said Chandra Bhushan, president and CEO, International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST).

Chanchal shared a similar view. "While taking strong and bold steps to mitigate the climate crisis, the government should also invest in preparedness, risk management and ensure measures for adaptation...this is the time when India could lead the path and give a strong message to the global community that this is the moment to rise up, scale up and speed up climate action," he said.

The climate experts stressed that the timelines in the latest IPCC report are more definitive as it has projected that the global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming by 2040, which renews the urgency for collective climate action.

"Previously, IPPC's special report in 2018 had projected that global warming is likely to reach 1.5 degrees Celsius between 2030 and 2052. The timelines have now been made more definitive, with the new IPCC assessment finding that the global temperature is expected to reach or exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming by 2040.

High 'R' value cause for concern no matter how low cases are: Centre

NEW DELHI, 10 AUG [NDTV]: The national 'R' value, or the reproductive rate of the coronavirus, is over the 1.0 mark, the government said today, amid continuing fears a third wave of infections could strike this month.

During a scheduled briefing on the Covid situation in the country, the Health Ministry furnished data that showed the national 'R' value crossing the 1.0-mark last month; the last time it was over this level was in March when it was 1.32, and that was before the second wave.

According to the government (and as of today), Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have an effective 'R' value of 1.3, and Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh have 'R' values of 1.1 and 1.0. Expected change in daily cases from three states is "likely increasing"; the trend from Punjab is "increasing".

Other states reporting high 'R' values are Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh (both 1.1), and Goa and Nagaland (both 1.0). The trend in daily new cases from these are "stable".

"No matter how low (daily) cases are, if 'R' value is over 1.0 it should be cause for concern,"

the government said, on a day India reported 28,204 new cases in 24 hours - the lowest in five months.

Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have reported a combined 36.91 lakh cases so far. Gujarat has reported over 8.25 lakh cases, Madhya Pradesh nearly eight lakh and Punjab around six lakh. Himachal Pradesh has reported over two lakh cases, Goa around 1.7 lakh and Nagaland 28,000.

In an earlier briefing the government had also said that the 'R' value for Kerala - which has replaced Maharashtra as the epicentre of new Covid cases in India - was 1.1. Today the government said 51.51 per cent of new cases this past week were from the state.

Kerala reported over 13,000 new COVID-19 cases in 24 hours, data from this morning showed. The southern state now has over 1.7 lakh active cases and a cumulative total of 35.66 lakh.

Concern over the 'R' value has been expressed repeatedly by experts over the past few weeks.

In June this number was less than 0.75. Since then it has inched its way up - a potentially alarming statistic hidden, to

some extent, by declining daily new cases.

In early July the national 'R' value was around 0.87 and by the middle of the month it was 0.95.

Last week Dr Randeep Guleria told NDTV that the steadily increasing 'R' value is cause for concern for the entire country. Dr Guleria, the chief of Delhi's AIIMS, urged governments to enforce strict micro-containment protocols to break chains of transmission.

Last month the centre issued an advisory to states and UTs on this topic, warning against "blatant violations of Covid norms". The warning came after disturbing images from hill stations and public markets, where hundreds (and thousands) gathered without social distancing or face masks.

The 'R' factor is a measure of how many people are being infected by one infected person. An 'R' of 1 means one person will, on average, infect one other person.

In a pandemic situation the 'R' target is less than 1.0, which ensures the virus will eventually stop spreading because it cannot infect enough people to sustain the outbreak.

No decision yet on nationwide NRC: Govt

NEW DELHI, AUG 10 (PTI): The government has not taken any decision on preparing a National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) for the whole country, Union minister Nityanand Rai said in Parliament on Tuesday.

He, however, said the government has decided to update the National Population Register (NPR) under the Citizenship Act, 1955, along with the first phase of Census 2021.

"Till now, the government has not taken any decision to prepare the National Register of Indian Citizens (NRIC) at national level," Rai said in a written reply to a question in the Lok Sabha.

So far, the NRC has been updated only in Assam. When the final list of the NRC was published in 2019, a total of 19.06 lakh of the 3.3 crore applicants were excluded, triggering a huge political row.

Replying to another question, the minister said any person who is not satisfied with the outcome of the decisions of the claims and objections during the process of preparing the NRC in Assam may prefer an appeal before the designated Foreigners Tribunals within 120 days from the date of such order.

Since those excluded from the NRC in Assam are yet to exhaust all possible legal remedies available to them, the question of their nationality verification does not arise at this stage, he added.

Referring to the NPR, Rai said the government has decided to update it along with the first phase of Census 2021.

He said the demographic and other particulars of each family and individual are to be updated or collected during the exercise of updating the NPR.

Deep Slumber: Supreme Court fines parties over criminal candidates



NEW DELHI, 10 AUG [NDTV]: Nine parties including the BJP and Congress were held guilty of contempt and eight of them fined by the Supreme Court today for not making public criminal records of their candidates.

Parties "refuse to wake up from deep slumber," the judges said. The Congress, BJP and five more parties were fined ₹ 1 lakh each and the CPM and Nationalist Congress Party were fined ₹ 5 lakh for not making public their candidates' criminal cases ahead of last year's Bihar election.

Records of criminal cases have to be made public by parties within 48 hours of the candidate's selection, the Supreme Court said in a big step towards decriminalising politics.

"Despite repeated appeals, political parties refuse to wake up from deep slumber," said the Supreme Court. "Political lawmakers will wake up soon and carry out major surgery for weeding out the malignancy of criminalisation of politics," the court noted in its order.

The Supreme Court's appeals had "fallen on deaf ears", said Justices RF Nariman and BR Gavi. "Though we want to do something urgently, our hands are tied, we can't encroach the domain of legislature," they remarked.

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The Supreme Court warned that the parties, in future, must display

the information on their websites in future. The Election Commission has been asked to create a mobile app that has the information for voters to access easily.

In an earlier ruling in February last year linked to the Bihar election, the Supreme Court had said candidates must upload details of cases against them either within 48 hours of their selection or at least two weeks before the first date of filing nomination papers. The latest order sticks to a 48-hour timeline.

The court was hearing petitions that call for suspending symbols of parties that had failed to disclose the criminal backgrounds of their candidates.

SDF to mark Int'l...

Ms Chamling mentioned that there are speakers and moderators from Sikkim and outside in order to get foster cross-cultural and cross-community learning. The keynote address will be delivered by former MP Lok Sabha from Odisha, Kalikesh Deo on the role of youth in politics.

The webinar is scheduled to end with the address by SDF president and former CM, Pawan Chamling on youth related issues and he will speak on how the youth can face challenges and give leadership in the new world.

She urged youth to be a part of the

programme and witness discussion and deliberation on youth related issues. She further mentioned that SDF welcomes youth to connect with the party.

An executive member of the student's wing, Urvashi Khaling mentioned that the IYD celebration was also to celebrate power, energy, thoughts and quality of youth. She added that the youth have the power and energy to give better shape to the world and right leadership to the coming generation. Stating that SDF is a youth-centric party, she welcomed youngsters of Sikkim to connect with the party's thoughts.

West Sikkim reviews REC Foundation and NITI Aayog projects

GYALSHING, 10 AUG (IPR): A meeting to review projects of REC Foundation and NITI Aayog under Aspirational District was held today at the Conference Hall of District Administrative Centre, Rabdentse, West Sikkim.

The meeting was chaired by the District Collector West, Karma R. Bonpo, and had the presence and participation of SDM (HQ), Anant Jain; Additional Director/Education Department, K.C. Gyatso and representatives from concerned departments.

The District Collector highlighted the projects under REC Foundation and NITI Aayog, and enquired about the projects which are completed and those on the verge of completion.

Further, he discussed



such projects which dealing with strengthening schools libraries, laboratories, renovation of hostels and provision of furniture. He enquired about the number of book shelves and books received till date. Additionally, he suggested to expedite the process of

construction of laboratories.

Further, the DC focused on basketball courts and informed that there are 16 courts under West District including two private schools. He suggested to promote sports activities based on availabil-

ity of playground and asked to submit list of schools having auditorium and stated that such schools will be provided indoor sports kits. He further suggested conducting virtual classes and monthly meetings through video conferencing to make use of

digital systems. He further asked school heads to be proactive.

Later, the DC asked the representatives to submit the utilization report at the earliest and said that first phase of the projects should be completed within this month.

N Korea vows stronger attack capabilities over allied drills

SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA (AP): The powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un ripped South Korea for proceeding with military exercises with the United States that she said are an invasion rehearsal and warned Tuesday that the North will work faster to strengthen its preemptive strike capabilities.

Kim Yo Jong's statement came after South Korean media reported that the allied militaries will begin four days of preliminary training on Tuesday before holding computer-simulated drills on Aug. 16-26.

Kim said she was given authority to release the statement, implying the message came directly from her brother.

Hours after her comments were published on state media, South Korea's defense and unification ministries said North Korean officials hadn't responded to their calls Tuesday afternoon over inter-Korean hotlines, which had been disconnected for a year before North Korea agreed to reopen them in late July. The Koreans then described the move as a conciliatory gesture.

South Korean officials said they were closely monitoring the development, but that it wasn't immediately clear whether North Korea had cut the communication channels again.

Kim Yo Jong described South Korea's decision to hold joint exercises despite earlier warnings by the North as "perfidious behavior" that will push the allies into facing a "more serious security threat."

She said continuing the drills exposed the hypocrisy of the Biden administration's offers to resume dialogue over North Korea's nuclear weapons program. She said a stable peace won't be achieved on the Korean Peninsula unless the United States withdraws its troops and weapons from the South.

Kim said North Korea will "put more spur to further increasing the deterrent of absolute capacity to cope with the

ever-growing military threats from the U.S.," including its capabilities for national defense and "powerful" preemptive strikes for "rapidly countering any military actions against us."

"(The drills) are the most vivid expression of the U.S. hostile policy towards (North Korea), designed to stifle our state by force, and an unwelcoming act of self-destruction for which a dear price should be paid as they threaten the safety of our people and further imperil the situation on the Korean Peninsula," Kim said. "For peace to settle on the peninsula, it is imperative for the U.S. to withdraw its aggression troops and war hardware deployed in (South) Korea. As long as the U.S. forces stay in (South) Korea, the root cause for the periodic aggravation of the situation on the Korean Peninsula will never vanish." It wasn't immediately clear whether North Korea's threat to advance its preemptive strike capabilities signaled a resumption of testing activity.

North Korea ended a year-long pause in ballistic tests in March by firing two short-range missiles into the sea, continuing a tradition of testing new U.S. administrations with weapons demonstrations and other provocations apparently aimed at measuring Washington's response and wresting concessions.

But North Korea hasn't conducted any known test launches since then as Kim Jong Un focused national efforts on fending off the coronavirus and salvaging a broken economy damaged further by pandemic border closures.

North Korea's angry reaction to the drills further diminishes South Korean hopes for improving bilateral ties, which rose after the North agreed to reopen long-stalled communication channels with the South. But just days after the lines were restored, Kim Yo Jong warned that the planned military drills between South Korea and the United States will undermine prospects for better inter-Korean ties.

BJP leader, 5 others arrested for anti-Muslim slogans at Delhi rally



NEW DELHI, 10 AUG [NDTV]: BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay and five others have been arrested over violent anti-Muslim slogans raised at a protest held at Delhi's Jantar Mantar on Sunday.

Ashwini Upadhyay, who organised the protest, was questioned till late last night along with other accused.

The arrests followed outrage over videos that showed a group shouting egregious slogans threatening Muslims at Jantar Mantar, a protest site in the heart of Delhi.

In clips on social media, "Ram, Ram" chants were raised along with threats to kill Muslims. "Hindustan mein rehna hoga jai shri ram kehna hoga (To stay in India,

must say Jai Shri Ram)," the group shouted barely a km from parliament and top government offices.

Questions were raised on the police not arresting the organiser Ashwini Upadhyay - who is a member of the Delhi BJP executive - and those visible in the videos.

The police finally acted only late on Monday evening and rounded up suspects for questioning.

The police claim they had denied permission to the protest over Covid precautions but a crowd showed up.

TV actor and BJP leader Gajendra Chauhan was also reportedly present in the protest though he is not seen in the clips.

Mr Upadhyay had

claimed he had no idea such slogans were raised.

In a statement, Mr Upadhyay had said the march against outdated colonial laws was organised by Save India Foundation. "I don't have any relation with Save India Foundation Trust. I was a guest like Mr. RVS Mani, Mr. Firoz Bakht Ahmed, Mr. Gajendra Chauhan. We reached at around 11:00 and left at 12:00. I never met these miscreants," he said in a statement.

Save India's director Preet Singh is among those arrested. The others are Vinod Sharma, Deepak Singh, Vineet Kranti and a suspect identified only by one name, Deepak.

Statehood before J&K Polls, bring back Kashmiri Pandits: GhulamNabi Azad

GhulamNabi Azad said Kashmiri Pandits who left the valley in early 1990s in the wake of eruption of terrorism be brought back.

Srinagar: Senior Congress leader GhulamNabi Azad on Tuesday called for restoration of Jammu and Kashmir's statehood before assembly elections are held and batted for land and job rights for its residents.

Speaking to reporters, Mr Azad said Kashmiri Pandits who left the valley in early 1990s in the wake of eruption of terrorism be brought back.

"The elections... should be conducted soon. But before the elections, the statehood

should be restored, which is very important. Kashmiri Pandits should be brought back.

"Our land and job (rights), which were taken away after Article 370 was revoked, should be secured like they were before (August 5, 2019) through a new law when the statehood is restored," he said.

On August 5, 2019, the Centre announced abrogation of special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution and its bifurcation into union territories.

The former chief minister visited the KheerBhawani temple shortly after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's visit earlier

in the morning. Mr Gandhi had left for Hazratbal shrine when Mr Azad reached Tullamulla.

"I came from Delhi today, but the flight reached late and that is why we could not meet here. But since it was in my programme, I came here and will also go to Hazratbal," he said.

Asked about the BJP's charge that the Congress party had lost its credibility, Mr Azad said, "Everyone knows who has the credibility."

After the KheerBhawani visit, Mr Azad went to Hazratbal shrine to pay obeisance. Later, he joined Rahul Gandhi at the inauguration of Congress Bhawan at M A Road.

World Indigenous People Day observed at SU

GANGTOK, 10 AUG (PIB): On the occasion of International Day of the World's Indigenous People- 2021, the department of Anthropology, Sikkim University organized a virtual special lecture on "The Indigenous Issue and Identity in the North East".

The special lecture was delivered by Dr Walter Fernandes, Director, North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati, Assam. The theme for this year's International Day of the World's Indigenous People 2021 was "Leaving one behind: Indigenous People and the Call for a New Social Contract".

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People is celebrated on 9th August every year globally to commemorate the first meeting of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations which was held in 1982 at Geneva. The objective of the celebration is to create awareness about the needs of the indigenous population living worldwide.

Indigenous people across the world belong to diverse groups having different cultures, languages, customs, belief and knowledge systems etc. They constitute about 476 million people which comprises of around five percent of the world's total population spreading across ninety countries. Indigenous people have their own customary laws and practices, self-governance and political systems which are being recognised and promoted by the various states. Their understanding of nature and society is based on the worldview of mutual respect and co-existence with the living and non-living beings.

In spite of various measures being taken by the respective state governments and international communities for the indigenous people, their rights have been historically violated and they are subjected to numerous atrocities, discrimination and injustices. They are being deprived from their lands and various resources,

which cut across the various groups and communities worldwide including India.

Keeping in view of their marginalities and vulnerabilities, there is a need for a new social contract to protect the interest of indigenous communities for creating a better world for all based on liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. The new social contract invites the imagination of an egalitarian social order based on mutual co-operation, participation, and respect.

This year's celebration is an important marker in the history of humankind as we all are witnessing the worldwide pandemic due to Covid-19. It needs a collective endeavour where there is a place for everyone including the indigenous population.

The programme was attended by the students, faculty members and research scholars from the University. Assistant Professor, Garima Thakuria, Department of Anthropology conducted the virtual programme.

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Bully at Your Own Risk

Democracy allows dissent and disagreement. The authorities should respect that

A friend narrated an interesting episode recently. He was on board an evening flight out of Kolkata. In these days of slow economies when airlines are not even maintaining their fleets properly, it comes as no surprise that they are also cutting back on housekeeping expenses. As a result, this plane was infested with mosquitoes. Everyone was swatting around until one of the passengers called in the stewards and requested them to do something about the machchars. The hostess said they could do nothing about it and pointed out that even they had to deal with the pesky insects. This happened recently, so there was the worry of dengue and malaria as well. This passenger kept complaining. All anyone wanted was for something to be done. Even a polite excuse might have worked. The plane had not yet taken off. A few minutes later, the captain radioed the air traffic controllers “reporting” that one of the passengers had become a dangerous nuisance and needed to be disembarked. This person was being persistent, may be even obnoxious at worst, not a dangerous nuisance and the only potentially dangerous presence in the plane was the swarm of mosquitoes and the officials would not even tortoise-coil away. The Captain, as the friend put it, did what the Indian state invariably does when it cannot or does not want to reason with someone – brand them a nuisance/ spoilsport/ antinational etc and get rid of them.

In another incident, the other day a cabbie was pulled over by a traffic cop who had received a wireless alert claiming that the vehicle had stopped at an unauthorized spot to pick up a passenger. The driver insisted that he had allowed in a passenger at a traffic jam (not of his making) and the passenger attested to as much. The cop was gruff and insisted he had to do his job. The cabbie had two choices – cough up the fine then and there or go to court, fight it, waste time and pay double if he loses.

If you are in the airline business, you will see nothing wrong in what the air crew in the first instance did. If you are taxi driver, vehicle owner or even a regular commuter, you will empathise with the challaned taxi driver because we have witnessed too many instances when traffic rules and driving etiquette are applied exclusively on the lay citizens and don't exist for anyone in khaki (and also the two shades of blue in Sikkim's case). We also see such attitudes manifest from positions of authority every time they even suspect a hint of emancipation rising in the cattle class (the mango people, as we like to call them nowadays). Sample what happened with the govt-student clash in 2014. Officials at HRDD were stereotypically pompous in addressing the concerns raised by the students, the college management was typically spineless in discussing the issue and the cops played to their stereotype when they went at the kids with rolls instead of some more patience just because the kids were not being quickly obedient enough. That day, however, the kids had had enough. They pushed back. Hard. Even though we have done everything to infantilize them by dictating their syllabus and routines and putting them into uncomfortable uniforms, they had shuffled through enough humiliation for the day. Later, the authorities continued to talk down to them during negotiations. Soon, the issue spilled out of the campus and everyone with an axe to grind against the government, the administration and all its other manifestations took to the streets and even slapped down the students when they said they wanted out.

There are lessons to be learned from all this, and the first one is for the authorities to realize that India is not a colony anymore. The cops maintain law & order for the benefit of the people and are not given uniforms and authority to keep the people in line. Air crews were given the power to deplane passengers because an out of control passenger midair posed a safety risk. They cannot throw off people for being obnoxious just as cops cannot be allowed a free run to interpret rules as they want and enforce them as they please. One understands the difficulties of allowing freedoms while enforcing order, but come on, we had seven decades to figure that one out. Democracy allows us safe releases for pent up frustrations, dissents and disagreements, but we plug those every time we allow authority to play the bully and impose indignities on the people. Then, occasionally the people explode. There is no need to suffer those when it could have been avoided and healthier democracy created in its lieu. But we are not allowing it, are we? Not with the latest round of arrest of free thinkers and intellectuals on the argument that they are Naxal collaborators. Sympathizers of the denied and marginalised may be, but that is not the same as collaborators.

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Vaccinating teenagers is beneficial, even if their vulnerability to COVID-19 is low

ALEX RICHTER
theconversation.com

The UK government has announced that all 16 to 17-year-olds will be offered a first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine in the coming weeks. Many countries are already vaccinating children over 12, so this decision is not out of step with what is going on elsewhere. Despite this, the reaction in Britain is likely to be mixed.

If it was just a question of: “Does this vaccine work in this age group?”, then the answer is easy. The Pfizer vaccine's phase 3 trial showed that it was safe and effective in people over 16.

But the question of whether it's right to give the vaccine to 16- to 17-year-olds is more complicated. The benefits of vaccinating someone against COVID-19 generally fall as the people being vaccinated get younger, and all vaccines carry some risk, even if almost always very, very small. And you also need to take into account the wider impact that vaccinating young people will have on the rest of British society and the world.

WEIGHING UP PERSONAL BENEFITS

It's been well documented that for most young people, COVID-19 is a mild or asymptomatic infection. It can't be argued that vaccination will significantly reduce severity of disease, hospitalisations or deaths among young people. But there are other benefits.

In a very small number of children, COVID-19 leads to a more serious condition called paediatric multisystem inflammatory syndrome (PIMS), where inflammation appears throughout the body. PIMS tends to affect younger children, but cases have also been recorded in teens and young adults. By lowering the risk of infection, vaccination may prevent it.

There's also the risk of long COVID, a much more common issue. Research suggests just under 2% of children who catch the coronavirus have symptoms that last for more than eight weeks. Long COVID is poorly understood and for some is a prolonged, debilitating illness. We currently have no treatment options for it and don't know how long it lasts. It also isn't limited to people who de-

velop severe illness when infected – so using vaccines to prevent mild disease may reduce the number of long COVID cases.

We also know that the immune response following vaccination is significantly higher than following natural infection. Therefore, although a proportion of 16 to 17-year-olds will have already been exposed to COVID-19 and have some immunity, taking a vaccine will still offer the best protection.

These benefits need to be balanced against the risk of side-effects. For the Pfizer vaccine, these are thought to be similar across all age groups. Mild side-effects – including pain at the injection site and chills – are common, resolve quickly and are well tolerated. There are, however, concerns about more serious side-effects such as a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) and inflammation of the heart (myocarditis or pericarditis).

But these are very rare – so much so that the UK government hasn't been able to reliably estimate how frequently they occur. But because of this, and because the risk of severe illness stemming from COVID-19 in young people is so low, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation hasn't stated outright that the benefits of vaccinating 16 to 17-year-olds clearly outweigh the risks – only that getting the balance between these benefits and risks is important.

KNOCK-ON EFFECTS

But the wider impact of vaccinating young people strengthens the case. Young people have already suffered significant disruption to their academic and social development, and suppressing the spread of the virus among them should mean that fewer have to isolate and miss school. It will also lessen any surge in cases when schools reopen after the summer holidays.

Lowering infections among children should also mean fewer parents and carers have to take time off work. Under the current guidance, if exposed to a positive case at home they still have to isolate, even if vaccinated.

Many young people will also have a close relative or contact who is clinically extremely vulnerable. It's possible that such people will have re-

sponded less well to their COVID-19 vaccination and so will be choosing to continue to shield. Vaccinating their family and friends helps reduce the chance of them catching the virus.

This idea of vaccinating young people to prevent infection in others isn't new. Giving the pneumococcal (pneumonia) vaccine to infants to prevent severe infection in early life has had a hugely beneficial effect in preventing community-acquired pneumonia in older adults. Vaccinating a further 1.4 million people in the UK population for COVID-19 is likely to further reduce transmission of the virus to those more vulnerable to severe disease.

We also know that random mutations occur when the coronavirus infects people and reproduces, and that the more of these mutations that occur, the more likely it is that viral variants will arise that can escape the effects of vaccines. Anything that reduces case numbers reduces this risk.

DO OTHER COUNTRIES NEED VACCINES MORE?

Despite all of the above, the ethics of offering vaccines to those unlikely to become very unwell will be debated, as rates of vaccination in many parts of the world are low. Many highly vulnerable people remain unprotected.

Recognising this, the World Health Organization has called for wealthier nations not to give fully vaccinated people booster doses until there has been a more equitable distribution of vaccines to the global population. A similar argument could be made against vaccinating younger people.

The challenge of balancing individuals' and societies' best interests in the context of a pandemic is challenging. We remain in an evolving situation and there is still so much we don't know about the behaviour and threat of the COVID-19 virus. It's likely that only history will be able to judge whether the UK vaccination strategy was the right one. But in the meantime, we may see vaccines being offered universally to younger age groups in the UK in due course.

[the writer is Professor and Honorary Consultant in Clinical Immunology, University of Birmingham]

Comply or Leave: the dilemma facing humanitarian agencies

MUKESH KAPILA
theconversation.com

The Ethiopian government has suspended the activities of three foreign humanitarian organisations which had been working in the Tigray region. Moina Spooner, from The Conversation Africa, asked Mukesh Kapila, a specialist in humanitarian affairs, to provide insights into the challenges humanitarian agencies face and what can be done to better support them.

WHAT ARE THE MAIN POLITICAL CHALLENGES THAT HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES FACE WHEN WORKING IN VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS?

Humanitarian agencies are often thrust into the heart of divisive situations. These are contentious crises without easy or quick solutions. Tools we may have turned to before, such as multilateralism – including the UN Security Council – seem to be paralysed nowadays. Diplomacy is generally ineffective and other UN-mandated interventions impossible.

Examples of these crises include Ethiopia's Tigray conflict, the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, or resistance against Myanmar's military regime.

In such situations, the core operating principles of humanitarian agencies – neutrality and impartiality – are little match for the egregious bad behaviour of warring groups hell-bent on achieving their objectives by any means.

The result is that humanitarian agencies are trodden-over and heavily pressured to co-operate with conflicted parties. Inevitably, compromises are struck to gain humanitarian access, and this can be manipulated as a war tactic. We see this with aid access controversies in Syria and Tigray.

In addition, part of the traditional humanitarian mission is to give ‘voice to the voiceless.’ But an agency doing that risks annoying one or other group, and suffers intimidation or expulsion. That means the end of any life-preserving help it was giving. A classic example was the arrest of Médecins Sans Frontières' (MSF) Darfur Coordinator in 2005 over a report on the high numbers of rape victims received in its clinics.

THERE IS ALWAYS MUCH IN-

TERNAL ANGST AMONG HUMANITARIANS: SHOULD WE SPEAK UP OR NOT?

When humanitarianism is politicised, trust and respect can be lost. This results in a vicious downward spiral. It starts with increased suspicion, diminished access, and even attacks on aid workers. This happened recently with MSF staff killed in Tigray.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF HUMANITARIAN AID AGENCIES BEING FORCED TO STOP OPERATIONS?

Many crisis-affected people are remarkably resilient, and should not be looked down upon as victims. They are immensely resourceful and draw on mutual support networks. I saw this, for example, in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile where people survived for many years with little aid while under constant attack by the Sudanese government.

Nevertheless, there are always gross inequalities within crisis-affected communities. The most vulnerable -- the bottom 30% -- are extra fragile. This is because they do not have any spare capabilities or resources to deal with sudden shocks. Typically, they include the unemployed, child-headed households, the elderly or disabled. They are the worst affected by disasters and wars. Often external humanitarian aid is their only means of survival.

When wars are waged without limits, the prevalent social safety net of health, education, water, growing crops, shelter, and local services are often targeted to weaken the resolve and capacity of the enemy. This has happened in Syria, Yemen, and Tigray. The inevitable consequence is that the weakest are crushed first.

So, when humanitarian agencies are forced to stop operations – by political decision or huge physical insecurity – the most vulnerable succumb first through starvation and disease.

As the conflict goes on, the general population is affected with rising rates of hunger and malnutrition, breakdown of basic water and sanitation, collapse of health and social services. Death rates rise. For example since the current Tigray crisis

started, 5.2 million have urgent needs including a million who are close to famine. Yet only 10% of necessary aid has been allowed to get into Tigray.

Tigray's experience is not unusual. For instance, I saw this first hand in the genocidal war in Sudan's Darfur region. In 2004, I was obliged to leave my post as UN Humanitarian Coordinator, when I spoke up publicly on the government's obstruction of humanitarian operations.

ARE THERE ANY LEGAL MECHANISMS WHICH CAN PREVENT THIS FROM HAPPENING?

We are not short of legal prescriptions. At the national level, most countries have laws to protect life and preserve human dignity. In addition, the military laws and doctrines of many countries include prohibitions on the violation of humanitarian installations or operations.

Countries have also universally recognised the right to provide humanitarian aid through creating – by parliamentary or other statutes – national Red Cross or Red Crescent organisations. These are not “ordinary NGOs” but special auxiliaries to national authorities.

But when a state authority itself is party to a conflict or perceives itself to be under grave threat, it can suspend constitutional guarantees and legal safeguards. We have seen that in the mass arrests and disappearances of people of Tigray origin inside Ethiopia.

When there is no credible domestic remedy for deliberately-placed constraints on humanitarian access and assistance, international laws -- to which most countries have signed up – are a fall back.

In the modern age, the Geneva Conventions on international humanitarian law prohibit attacks on humanitarian operations and workers. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court criminalises such aggression in the context of war crimes. And the UN Security Council Resolution 1502 protects humanitarian personnel and access.

There are several other similar treaty laws. For example, the Kampala Convention prohibits attacks on relief work.

Such international treaty-based laws may have a broadly positive effect because of the fear of prosecution under national and international laws. However, this is more theory

than practice. There are few examples of successful accountability. The constraint is in bringing transgressors physically to the courts. This is because states are often implicated themselves and unwilling to be held accountable.

There is slow, but steady, progress in prosecuting perpetrators of war crimes. However, there is no equivalent advancement of justice in relation to the specific transgressions of the right to give and receive humanitarian aid.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENSURE HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES CONTINUE TO HELP PEOPLE IN POLITICALLY VOLATILE SITUATIONS?

There are no easy solutions. A ‘zero tolerance’ policy needs a multi-pronged, long-term approach.

First, there could be better data collection and monitoring of humanitarian violations to understand patterns and trends. This would inform tailored strategies in particularly problematic contexts.

Second, humanitarians must work professionally and resist political manipulation and intimidation as courageously as possible. This needs better training and organisational management. It also means preparing-for inherent risks – including to life and limb – that come with operating in volatile contexts. Modern humanitarian practice is not for the faint-hearted.

Third, politicians, law-makers, and legal practitioners must extend current frameworks – especially on where and how alleged offences are tried – to reduce the bureaucratic and physical spaces where perpetrators can hide.

Fourth, the public can help by standing up more to egregious misbehaviours that threaten humanitarianism. This can be done through expressing outrage, lobbying political policymakers, and supporting reputable journalists and investigators who expose wrong-doings.

In conclusion, the face of humanitarianism is changing fast. Its values-driven, consent-based modus operandi frays in the face of so many threats. Reclaiming that noble mission will be a long and uncertain endeavour.

[the writer is Professor in Global Health & Humanitarian Affairs, University of Manchester]

Assam-Mizoram border issue settled for now, says Himanta Biswa Sarma

Himanta Biswa Sarma faulted previous Congress governments for not demarcating boundaries clearly while carving out new states.

New Delhi: Underlining that peace and tranquility have been restored at the border with Mizoram, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma today said there cannot be an overnight resolution of the decades-old border dispute between the states as it is a very complex issue.

Noting that the border disputes go back to the British era, Mr Sarma told PTI in an interview that Assam has been holding talks with other states too and faulted the previous Congress governments for not clearly demarcating boundaries while carving out new states.

Six Assam police personnel were killed in a violent clash between the police forces of Assam and Mizoram last month over the border dispute between the two states following a fresh escalation of tension.

Mr Sarma, who is on a four-day visit to the national capital, met Prime Minister Narendra Modi today.

"Mizoram has been



demanding the inner line forest based on the notification issued by British in 1870. Assam's position is that there is a constitutional boundary and Mizoram is asking about the historical boundary. Assam is protecting its constitutional boundary," the BJP leader asserted.

However, he added that as of now the issue between the two states has been resolved.

"We have discussed and settled the issue for the time being. I am in touch with the Mizoram chief minister and speak

to him at least twice a day," he said.

Mr Sarma said there were problems related to "our borders for the last several decades" and last September, "mistrust and differences" between the two states increased, resulting in this violent incident, but now the situation is peaceful.

"The governments of Assam and Mizoram have issued a joint statement urging for peace and tranquility. As of now, things are normal, traffic is moving to Mizoram as usual. I can say as of now

the situation is normal, peaceful and there is no tension," Mr Sarma said.

Mr Sarma blamed the Congress for border disputes between the states in the Northeast as the party, which ruled the country for decades, didn't demarcate the boundaries.

"...when Congress created a state (in north-east) it didn't demarcate the boundary and annexed in the law itself which created the state.

"The Congress never wanted a united North-East, that's why it left us

to fight for our borders. But it could have been done better at the time of the creation of states. So over the period of time mistrust increased but now we are trying to resolve it," the Assam Chief Minister said.

Northeastern states are different from each other but they have commonalities as well, so for resolving the disputes, "we need to look at our commonalities", Mr Sarma said.

"We, the North-eastern states, are talking to each other and

a long-term solution can be achieved by discussing the issue. Sometime over the table, we would be able to resolve it," Mr Sarma said.

Talking about Assam's border disputes, he said the government has been holding discussions with Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh as well.

"With the state of Meghalaya, we are progressing well. We have started a discussion with Arunachal Pradesh. At least now states are talking about borders. Discussing among themselves or at least with one or two states, we might have a solution," he said.

2 Persons from outside J&K have bought property since 370 move: centre



Earlier, the Jammu and Kashmir assembly was constitutionally empowered to define who is a resident and only those people could apply for jobs or own property in the former state.

New Delhi: Only two persons from outside Jammu and Kashmir in the two years since Article 370 was abrogated and two Union Territories were carved out of the former state, the government said today in parliament.

"As per the information provided by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, two persons from outside Jammu and Kashmir have purchased two properties in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir since August 2019," Union Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai told Lok Sabha in a written reply.

The minister was asked whether the government or people from other states faced any "hardship or impediments" while buying properties in the Jammu and Kashmir. "No such instance has been reported to the government," he replied.

The Home Ministry's reply was to a question on whether it was true that many people from other states have purchased and are also interested in buying properties in Jammu and Kashmir after the removal of Article 370, which gave the state special status under the Constitution.

The central government scrapped special status to Jammu and Kashmir on August 5, 2019.

After the complete merger of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union of India, the administration formulated a new

definition for domicile for Jammu and Kashmir.

According to that definition, a person living there for at least 15 years is eligible to be a permanent resident of the Union Territory.

The government notification also extended domicile rights to central government employees who have served in the state for 10 years and their children.

Earlier, the Jammu and Kashmir assembly was constitutionally empowered to define who is a resident and only those people could apply for jobs or own property in the former state.

However, the home ministry last year amended a 2010 law, the Jammu and Kashmir Civil Services (Decentralisation and Recruitment Act), and replaced the term "permanent residents" with "domiciles of Jammu and Kashmir".

Boulders rolling downhill cause traffic chaos on Uttarakhand Highway

There have been no reports of any casualty so far. However, what followed is pure traffic chaos on National Highway 58 (connecting Rishikesh-Srinagar) near Tota Ghati in Uttarakhand. The area has been cordoned off post the incident.

New Delhi: At first they are all looking skywards, mobile phone cameras pointed in the same direction and then it happened: triggered by a landslide, boulders are seen rolling downhill on a national highway in Uttarakhand with people scrambling to safer areas.

There have been no reports of any casualty so far. However, what followed is pure traffic chaos on National Highway 58 (connecting Rishikesh-Srinagar) near Tota Ghati in Uttarakhand. The area has been cordoned off post the incident.

On July 21, around two dozen people were stranded after a series of landslides occurred along the Tanakpur-Ghat national highway in Uttarakhand's Champawat district following heavy rains.

Four days later, on July 25, nine tourists were killed after a massive landslide hit a bridge in Himachal Pradesh's Sangla valley. In a terrifying video, large chunks of rocks were seen breaking off a mountain and rolling down into the valley below. The video showed a section of the bridge crumbling and plunging into a river after a boulder hits it.

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Bangladesh vaccinating Rohingya refugees amid virus surge



DHAKA, BANGLADESH (AP): Bangladesh's government and aid agencies started vaccinating Rohingya refugees Tuesday as a virus surge raises health risks in the sprawling, cramped camps where more than 1 million people who fled Myanmar are sheltering.

The highly transmissible delta variant is driving an infection surge across Bangladesh, with around 20,000 infections and 200 deaths recorded so far in Cox's Bazar district, the southern region bordering Myanmar where the refugee camps are located.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said a national positivity rate of around 30% indicates the spread of COVID-19 is much higher, especially with cramped conditions and the risks faced by many people living in the refugee camps.

The government's Civil Surgeon's office in Cox's Bazar and aid agencies began the vaccination campaign across 34

camps alongside Bangladesh's national vaccination effort.

About 500 Bangladesh Red Crescent staff and volunteers joined the health workers for the campaign in collaboration with the U.N. refugee agency, according to a statement from the international body.

Rohingya community leaders, front-line health care volunteers in the camps, and Rohingya older than 55 are in the first group to be vaccinated. Over 65,000 of the nearly 900,000 refugees will be vaccinated in the first cohort, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees said in an email to The Associated Press.

"COVID-19 has spread all over the world. We came here to get vaccinated so that it does not harm us," Nurul Islam, 65, said in a camp at Ukhiya in Cox's Bazar, as he waited for shots alongside hundreds of other refugees.

Bangladesh has re-

ported more than 1.3 million infections, including 22,897 deaths from COVID-19 since the pandemic began.

Experts say the full toll may be underreported, as many people don't go to hospitals and many others died before getting tested. Across the country's vast border regions with India, infections from the delta variant have spread amid concern that a lack of awareness about masks and maintaining other health guidelines could lead to a deteriorating COVID-19 situation in the densely populated nation.

Less than 5% population of the country's 160 million people are fully vaccinated. The initial campaign was interrupted in April when India stopped exporting AstraZeneca vaccines to Bangladesh, which had made a purchase agreement for 30 million doses.

The government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina bolstered its ef-

fort to get vaccines from other sources, particularly China, and began a new round of vaccinations nationwide starting last weekend.

The country now a good stock of vaccines, mostly China's Sinopharm. Officials say over 3 million people received a shot in the first two days of the new campaign.

More than 700,000 Rohingya fled Buddhist-majority Myanmar in 2017 as a harsh military crackdown was waged against the ethnic group following an attack by insurgents. Other Rohingya have lived in refugee camps in Bangladesh following earlier waves of persecution.

The 2017 crackdown included rapes, killings and the torching of thousands of homes, and was termed ethnic cleansing by global rights groups and the United Nations. While Bangladesh and Myanmar have sought to arrange repatriations, the Rohingya are too fearful to return home.

"Man-Made Flood": Mamata Banerjee hits out at centre over dam plan delay

After touring the flood-hit areas, Mamata Banerjee said she would send a team to New Delhi to pursue the Centre in approving the project.

Ghatal (West Bengal): West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee hit out at the Centre today over flood in the Paschim Medinipur district, stating that the situation was a result of the Centre dilly-dallying the Ghatal Master Plan project.

After touring the flood-hit areas of Ghatal, Ms Banerjee said she would send a team to New Delhi to pursue the

Centre in approving the project.

"This is a man-made flood. The Centre is not paying heed to our requests for the Ghatal Master Plan. Repeated requests are falling into deaf ears," she said.

"I have conducted a survey of the area. I will prepare a report on this," she added.

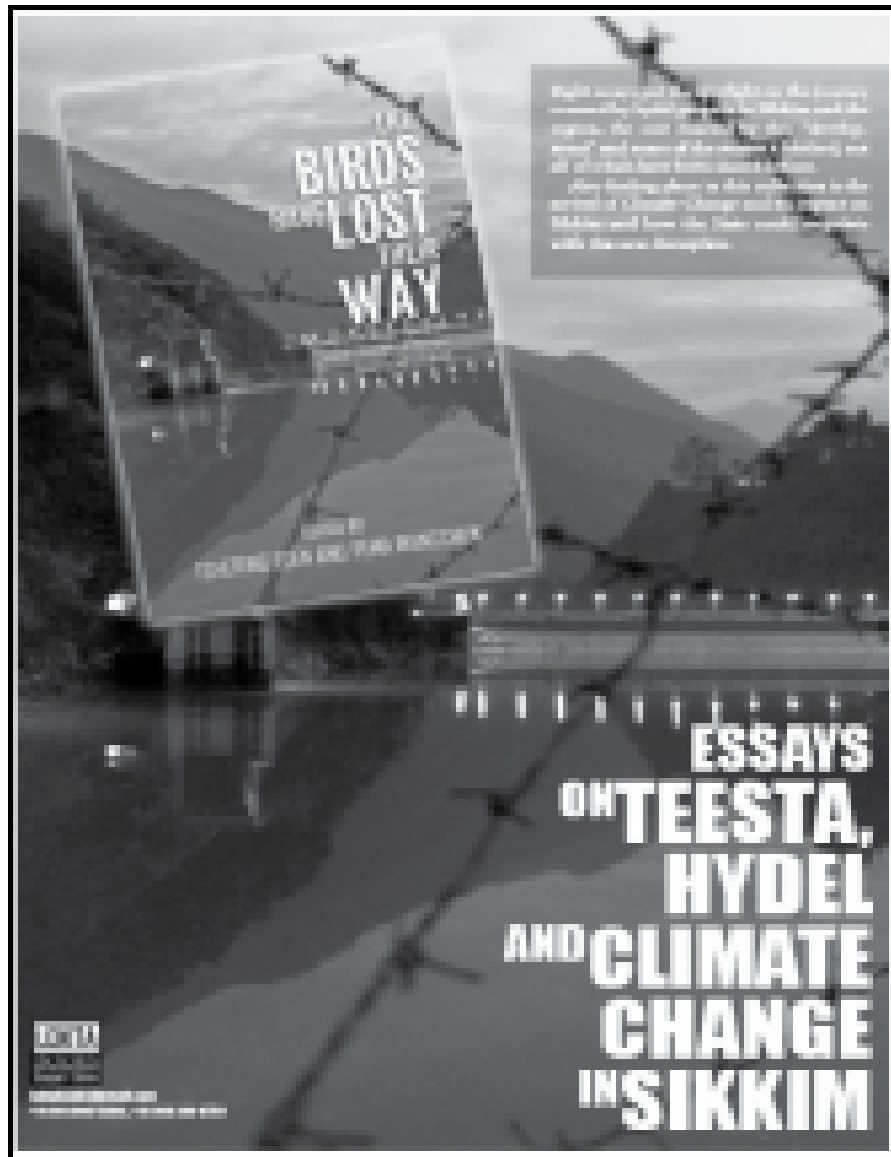
As per the Ghatal Master Plan, several projects would be undertaken to desilt the rivers in the area, repair the canals and build a dam on the Shilabati river, among others.

Ms Banerjee conducted an aerial survey of the areas while returning from Jhargram.

Her helicopter landed in Moyrapukur from where she went to meet people affected by the flood.

The administrative meeting, which was scheduled to be held at an auditorium in the area, was cancelled because it was inundated, officials said.

At least seven districts in West Bengal were flooded and at least 23 people killed due to incessant rain last week.



Opposition bowlers only need a few good balls to get England batsmen out: Boycott

LONDON, AUG 10 (PTI): Former captain Geoffrey Boycott has slammed the England batsmen for showing lack of patience and technique in the drawn first Test against India.

Boycott feels some of the batsmen can't resist the temptation of poking at the ball when it is not meant to be hit and said too much focus on one-day cricket is adding to their struggles.

Skipper Joe Root was only England batsmen who made an impact in the series-opener, scoring 109 and 64 in his two innings.

"I recently bumped into Graham Gooch and we chatted about England's batting. He summed it all up by saying: Fiery, if bowlers keep it tight for four balls, then you know our batsmen will have a go at the fifth and sixth deliveries and there is every chance they will get themselves out," Boycott wrote in The Telegraph.

"The culture of cricket has changed. Many of us batsmen love playing shots and because of the diet of one day cricket, modern players are pretty good at it, but it is their defensive technique that lets them down.

"It might sound unfashionable because of franchise leagues to talk about staying in and being defensive but, like Goochie said, teams only have to bowl a few good balls because they know batsmen will soon be tempted to play a big shot."

England's batsmen had also struggled in the preceding home series against New Zealand.

"We supporters are disappointed when they look to attack all the time, but we should not be surprised, because that is the type of cricket they have been taught at county level.

"Look at Zak Crawley. He is symptomatic of the problem. Over the last number of years young batsmen have been taught to whack the ball because there are so many one day matches," lamented Boycott.

"The talk is all about strike rates but for Test match cricket that is a load of rubbish. If you can't defend, then top bowlers in Test match cricket with a newish ball will find your weaknesses. What is the point of having a range of eye-catching strokes if you can't stay in? That is the root cause of his problems." He also had a go at opener Rory Burns and Dom Sibley.

"Not just former Test players but even club players look at Rory Burns and Dom Sibley and think they can do better.

"Sibley is the opposite of Crawley. He has stickability but his lack of strokes hurts him. He cannot rotate the strike, so if he cannot move his score along, and the team's score, then he creates enormous pressure on himself.

Fewer medals, more heart for US at a most unusual Olympics

TOKYO, AUG 10 (AP): Kara Winger is the American record-holder in the javelin throw who just wrapped up her fourth Olympics. She has never finished higher than sixth place.

When she got the call over the weekend telling her she would be carrying the flag Sunday for the United States at the closing ceremony of the Tokyo Games, her first reaction was "shock."

"I expected tweets with people saying What has she done?" Winger said.

Turns out, an awful lot over a career that has spanned two decades. That the American athletes chose her as flagbearer is a fitting lens through which to view the U.S. accomplishments at these Games.

The Americans won 113 medals, which, for the fifth straight Summer Games, was double-digits more than the nearest competition. It was, however, eight fewer than what they won five years ago in a Rio de Janeiro Olympics with fewer events.

When the athletes voted for Winger to represent them, they tapped into the core message resonating inside a fractured, fractious U.S. Olympic family over the last few years: The medals shouldn't matter more than the athletes who win them. Or sometimes not matter at all.

"We spent a ton of energy on creating an environment where people could be heard, and feel safe to be heard, said Sarah Hirshland, who came on as the CEO of the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee in 2018.

She was tasked with repairing the damage from sexual-abuse cases that led athletes to wonder if they were valued for more than simply what they won.



If Winger as flagbearer is one sign that the USOPC has made some headway, then Simone Biles gets credit for making sure the message stayed front-and-center despite the hectic, pandemic-tainted run-up to an Olympics.

The willingness of the highest-profile athlete at the Games to step away because it didn't feel right, and to place her personal welfare over victory for herself and country, was startling at first.

Much more than costing medals, what Biles did was re-center the focus. As the Olympics moved into their second week, all but the most cynical observers started celebrating athletes for winning bronze or nothing even if they were picked to win gold. "These are not the USOPC's

medals, these are the athletes' medals, Hirshland explained as the Biles decision was still reverberating.

That was part of what Hirshland pitched as a new outlook for the USOPC.

Leading up to the Games, the USOPC introduced new mental-health offerings and created a new athlete-service division first as a nod to the fallout from the sex-abuse cases, then as a resource to help athletes cope with a yearlong delay and the COVID pandemic.

Their offices stayed busy over the 17 days in Tokyo.

In the end, COVID-19 knocked out only four of the 600-plus athletes officially named to the team, a remarkable logistical challenge in a pandemic that came with its share

of stumbles and critiques. Some athletes who worked all their lives to get to this point were bitter that they couldn't share the trip with friends, family or fans.

That was largely a decision by local organizers that left the USOPC with limited options.

Still, Hirshland and the rest of the federation leaders are bound to hear their fair share of critiques if not about Tokyo, then about what lies ahead.

The Beijing Games start a scant 180 days from Sunday's closing act in Tokyo. Much as the USOPC was forced into playing a lead role in changing the outlook on the IOC's rule banning demonstrations, it will be pressed by some to boycott those Games as a sign of protest of China's

much-criticized human-rights record. The federation almost certainly won't go down that road, but the questions will persist.

So will doubts about its effectiveness in putting athletes first. A snapshot: One program designed to funnel more money into athletes' pockets through sponsorship deals has been lauded by some, but criticized by others in the tightly knit world of agents who deal with Olympic clients.

And the USOPC is still involved in a number of lawsuits stemming from abuse cases so expect more negative headlines about the organization for months and years to come.

The federation also must figure out how to keep its NCAA pipeline rolling, and determine whether new rules that allow college athletes to make money off their names and likenesses will hurt or help the Olympic operation.

And, like it or not, the medal count did fall by 6%, even though there were more sports and more medals to be won. If it happens again three years from now in Paris, with the Los Angeles Olympics on deck, it stands to reason not everyone will be so sanguine.

And yet, there's a reason Winger got the nod to carry the flag Sunday night.

Her fellow Olympians appreciated the story of an athlete who devoted her life to throwing the javelin "A lot of us are in weird sports," Winger acknowledged knowing the rewards wouldn't all be hanging from her neck in the end.

"An absolute joy, Winger said. I don't know what the medals feel like, but I don't think I'll ever top this honor. And for me, that's totally, totally fine.

Messi's arrival at PSG would give coach tactical headache



PARIS, AUG 10 (AP): If Lionel Messi does become the latest star to help Paris Saint-Germain's quest to win the elusive Champions League, coach Mauricio Pochettino must work out the best way to accommodate him in a top-heavy attack.

Messi bid a tearful farewell to Barcelona on Sunday. At the same time, PSG was in talks with his team trying to finalize a deal to sign him amid reports Messi had flown to Paris on Sunday for a meeting.

Talk of Messi's imminent arrival led several hundred PSG fans to wait outside Le Bourget airport, to the north of Paris, which is often used by PSG and the national team.

Messi would become the biggest star to arrive at Parc des Princes since cash-rich Qatari owners QSI took over the club 10 years ago.

Messi's arrival would surpass even the fanfare of Neymar's world-record signing for 222 million euros (261 million) from Barcelona in 2017, or ZlatanIbrahimovic's brazenly self-promoting presentation by the Eiffel Tower in 2012.

They never won a Ballon d'Or, let alone the record six Messi has.

The soccer great's staggering tally of 672 goals for Barca includes an extraordinary 50-goal season in 2012; 96 league goals and a remarkable 133 overall across 2012 and 2013; eight Spanish league and six Champions League scoring titles.

Not to mention four Champions League trophies with Barcelona, a record 91 goals in a calendar year for club and country, and a Copa America title with Argentina.

Even Messi's age he's 34 will have little impact on the huge anticipation

that his arrival would generate within French soccer and beyond.

But where is Pochettino, a fellow Argentine, going to play him in attack which includes Neymar, France's World Cup star KylianMbappe, Copa America match-winner Angel Di Maria and sharpshooter Mauro Icardi?

Mbappe cost 180 million euros (212 million) and netted a career-high 42 goals last season. The club paid 50 million euros (59 million) for Icardi. He showed his finishing skills on Saturday night in PSG's league-opener a 2-1 win at Troyes and has 34 goals in 64 games for PSG.

Icardi looks certain to fall behind in the pecking order and could even be sold or loaned to take some weight off the club's huge wage bill.

Pochettino needs to decide whether to use Di Maria in a four-man

attack at the risk of unbalancing midfield. PSG showed last season and in the way it conceded a soft goal from a corner against Troyes that it needs protection at the back.

Here's a look at possible PSG tactical formations with Messi in the side:

4-3-3: Messi on the right of attack, Neymar on the left and Mbappe playing through the middle in his preferred center forward's role. Messi has played in this role many times at Barca. But while the 4-3-3 also offers greater security in midfield, there's no place for Di Maria.

4-2-3-1: This time Di Maria takes his place on the right flank with Messi playing behind Mbappe in a playmaker's role and Neymar again attacking from the left side. Great on the eye but a two-man midfield likely Marco Verratti and new signing GeorginioWijnaldum would make PSG vulnerable to counterattacks.

3-5-2: Possibly the best option with Messi pushing up front alongside Mbappe, and Neymar using his slick probing and passing playing behind them. Verratti and Wijnaldum would get welcome support in the middle. But this formation would once again be at the expense of Di Maria, who was arguably PSG's best player last season along with Mbappe and goalkeeper KeylorNavas.

Indian football team's camp to return to Kolkata after 15 years



NEW DELHI, AUG 10 (PTI): The national football team's camp will be held in Kolkata after 15 years when initial 23 probables assemble at the 'City of Joy' on August 15 to prepare for next month's international friendlies.

The training sessions will start from August 16, the AIFF said in a statement.

This will be the first time Blue Tigers' camp will be held in Kolkata as they assembled here for training way back in 2006 ahead of the FIFA World Cup Qualifier against Saudi Arabia.

The camp will be conducted under a secured bio-bubble adhering to the laid-down health parameters in wake of the current COVID-19 pandemic situation. The contingent will also be undergoing regular testing.

National team head coach Igor Stimac has named an initial list of 23 probables, leaving out players from ATK

MohunBagan and Bengaluru FC owing to the two club's commitments in the AFC Cup in the Maldives.

Players from both clubs will be joining the squad immediately after finishing their club commitments in the continental tournament.

"I am very happy to meet with my players again and get ready for the upcoming challenges forward together," Stimac said.

"We wish both the Indian clubs good luck and hope they do well in the AFC Cup. Meanwhile, we need to check on the rest of the players who will kick-off the camp with us next week, and choose the best ones until the rest of the players join us," added the Croatian.

The 23 players who will be joining the camp on August 15 are:

G O A L K E E P E R S : Dheeraj Singh Moirangthem, Vishal Kaith. **DEFENDERS:** Ashish-

Rai, SeritonFernandes, Adil Khan, Chinglensana Singh, Narender, Rahul Bheke, Akash Mishra, MandarRaoDessai.

MIDFIELDERS: Lallengmawia, Glan Martins, Jeakson Singh, AnirudhThapa, Brandon Fernandes, Sahal Abdul Samad, HalicharanNarzary, Bipin Singh, Yasir Mohammed.

FORWARDS: Rahul KP, FarukhChoudhary, IshanPandita, Rahim Ali.

The ATK MohunBagan and Bengaluru FC players who will be joining the camp after their AFC Cup duties are:

GOALKEEPERS: Amrinder Singh, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu.

DEFENDERS: PriyamKotal, Ashutosh Mehta, SandeshJhingan, Subhasish Bose.

MIDFIELDERS: Udan-ta Singh, PronayHalder, Suresh Singh Wangjam, AshquieKuruniyan.

FORWARDS: Liston Colaco, Manvir Singh, Sunil Chhetri.

Canadian faces spy ruling as Huawei decision looms

BEIJING (AP): A former Canadian diplomat who was charged with spying after his government arrested an executive of Chinese tech giant Huawei faces a possible verdict Wednesday as Beijing steps up pressure on Canada ahead of a court ruling on whether to hand over the executive to face U.S. criminal charges.

Michael Spavor and another Canadian were detained in China in what critics labeled “hostage politics” after the executive’s 2018 arrest in connection with possible violations of trade sanctions on Iran. On Tuesday, a court rejected the appeal of a third Canadian whose prison term in a drug case was abruptly increased to death following the executive’s arrest.

Canada and other governments including Australia and the Philippines face growing Chinese pressure including trade boycotts in disputes over human rights, the coronavirus and territorial claims. Washington has warned Americans they face “a heightened risk of arbitrary detention” in China for reasons other than to enforce the law.

Canadian Ambassador Dominic Barton said he would go to see Spavor in Dandong, about 210 miles (340 kilometers) east of Beijing on the North Korean border.

Asked when a ruling might come, Barton said, “our sense



is, it’s tomorrow.” As for the second detained Canadian, entrepreneur Michael Kovrig, the ambassador said, “we have not received any indication of that.” MengWanzhou, the chief financial officer of Huawei Technologies Ltd., was arrested Dec. 1, 2018, in Vancouver on U.S. charges of lying to the Hong Kong arm of the British bank HSBC about possible dealings with Iran in violation of trade sanctions.

A judge in Vancouver is due to hear final arguments in the next few weeks about whether Meng should be extradited to the United States. Her lawyers argue the case is politically motivated and what she is accused of isn’t

a crime in Canada. China’s government has criticized the arrest as part of U.S. efforts to hamper its technology development. Huawei, a maker of network equipment and smartphones, is China’s first global tech brand and is at the center of U.S.-Chinese tension over technology and security. On Tuesday, the Higher People’s Court of Liaoning province in the northeast rejected an appeal by Robert Schellenberg, whose 15-year prison term on drug smuggling charges was increased to death in January 2019 following Meng’s arrest.

The court sent the case to China’s supreme court for review, a required step before a

death sentence can be carried out. The Canadian government criticized the ruling as arbitrary and the penalty as “cruel and inhumane.”

“We condemn the verdict in the strongest possible terms and call on China to grant Robert clemency,” Ambassador Barton told reporters by phone after attending the appeals hearing in Shenyang, about 12 miles (20 kilometers) west of Dandong.

Schellenberg was convicted of smuggling 222 kilograms (448 pounds) of methamphetamine, according to the court.

Asked whether the three cases were linked to Meng’s, Barton said, “I don’t think it’s a coincidence these are happen-

ing right now while events are going on in Vancouver.” He said the case was “part of the geopolitical process.”

He said Canadian diplomats talked with Schellenberg after the ruling but declined to give details.

“He is remarkably composed,” Barton said. “We had a good conversation.”

Diplomats from the United States, Germany, Australia and France attended Tuesday’s hearing, according to Barton. He expressed thanks to them and other governments for expressing support for Canada.

Two other Canadians, Fan Wei and XuWeihong, also were sentenced to death on drug charges in separate cases in 2019 as relations between Beijing and Ottawa soured.

The Huawei case is one of a series of conflicts between Beijing and other governments over China’s technology ambitions, the coronavirus, human rights, Hong Kong and claims to control over the South China and East China Seas.

China has tried to pressure Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s government by imposing restrictions on imports of canola seed oil and other products from Canada.

Meanwhile, Beijing is blocking imports of Australian wheat, wine and other products after its government called for an investigation into the origin of the coronavirus pandemic.

Hong Kong leader supports retaliatory sanctions law

HONG KONG (AP): Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam expressed support Tuesday for legislation allowing retaliatory sanctions after the U.S. and other Western governments punished city officials over the ongoing crackdown on democracy activists.

Lam said the anti-foreign sanctions law should be adopted in Hong Kong via local legislation, rather than imposed by Beijing, and that she has told the Chinese government about her views.

Separately on Tuesday, the pro-democracy Professional Teachers’ Union — the city’s largest single-industry trade union with 95,000 members — said it has disbanded because the “social and political environment has changed in recent years.”

The disbandment came after the government severed ties with the union last week and accused it of spreading anti-Beijing and anti-government sentiment. The cutting of ties came hours after Chinese state media called the union a “malignant tumor” that should be eradicated.

Lam’s support for the adoption of the anti-sanctions law in Hong Kong came after China implemented a broad anti-sanctions law in June. Anyone hit with retaliatory sanctions could be subject to visa restrictions, have their assets

seized or frozen and be banned from doing business with any Chinese company or individual in China.

The law comes after the U.S. slapped sanctions on dozens of Chinese and Hong Kong officials — including Lam — over their role in suppressing Hong Kong’s autonomy.

“There are external forces, or foreign governments or Western media, which would make use of the opportunity to weaken our international financial center status as well as a weakening confidence in Hong Kong,” Lam said.

Beijing imposed a national security law on Hong Kong last year, aiming to crack down on dissent following months of anti-government protests in the city that at times descended into violence. Over 100 pro-democracy figures have been arrested under the national security law.

Critics have slammed the crackdown on political dissent, saying the former British colony is losing the freedoms it was promised when it was handed over to Chinese control in 1997.

This year, Hong Kong changed its election laws to reduce the number of directly elected lawmakers and give a largely pro-Beijing committee the leeway to nominate lawmakers aligned with Beijing.

Despite calm, Israeli town copes with scars of rocket fire

SDEROT, ISRAEL (AP): Just three months after the latest war between Israel and Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip, the border town of Sderot appears to be on the road to recovery.

The streets are bustling, and the town is filled with well-kept parks and playgrounds. The local real-estate market is booming.

But underneath the veneer of normalcy, the scars of years of rocket fire run deep.

Metal rocket fragments are on display outside the main police station, as a museum of sorts. Next to every park and bus stop is a small concrete bomb shelter — often decked out with colorful murals and street art. An Iron Dome rocket defense battery sits on the eastern edge of town, a few hundred meters (yards) from a new apartment complex.

Some Sderot residents say they jump at the smallest noise. Parents report children still wetting their beds or being too scared to sleep alone.

Noam Biton says she has enjoyed a normal childhood in Sderot. But the 16-year-old high school student says it hasn’t always been easy. One of her strongest memories was an air-raid siren that sounded while she was attending a bar mitzvah celebration on what had been a quiet day.

“We lay on the ground, three of us,” she said. “The only thing protecting us was a car.” The rocket landed nearby, spraying shrapnel in the area.

Outgoing and active in her local scout troop, Biton says she is always careful to sit next to the door when she rides the bus — just in case there is an air-raid siren and she needs to evacuate quickly.

Her mother Dvora, a lifelong resident, says uncertainty is a constant companion. “It saddens you that at any moment someone controls your life,” she said. “We can’t escape.”

Israel and Hamas, an Islamic militant group that opposes Israel’s existence, have fought four wars and numerous skirmishes since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007, a year after winning a Palestinian election.

It is impossible to compare conditions in Gaza and in southern Israel. Israeli strikes have killed some 4,000



Palestinians, including hundreds of civilians, in the four wars and inflicted heavy damage on Gaza’s infrastructure. Tens of thousands of people, unable to flee the impoverished and blockaded territory, suffer from deep psychological wounds.

Israelis are now protected by a rocket-defense system, have the option of temporarily escaping rocket range and have access to psychological counseling and government support. Still, over 100 people have died on the Israeli side in the four wars, while heavy rocket fire has brought life to a standstill for millions of people during times of fighting. Even during times of quiet, rocket fire can erupt at any moment without warning.

No place in Israel has been hit harder by Palestinian rocket fire than Sderot, a working-class community just about 1.5 kilometers (1 mile) from the Gaza border. Yet two decades after the first rudimentary rockets landed in town, experts are still struggling to figure out their long-term effects on a generation of parents and children who have come of age in this traumatic environment.

“People who are living in the south of Israel live with the understanding that it’s just a question of time until the next time,” said Talia Levanon, director of the Israel Trauma Coalition.

“You are literally trying to heal from the last time while preparing for the

next time, which makes our job very, very tough,” she said.

Levanon’s nonprofit operates a series of “resilience centers” throughout southern Israel that provide a variety of services, including counseling and workshops for families and communities.

In an indication of how widely people have been affected, she said that during a brief round of violence in 2019, nearly two-thirds of the area’s 60,000 residents received services from a resilience center.

The 11-day war between Israel and Hamas in May was the latest reminder of Sderot’s precarious position. Nearly 300 rockets were fired at Sderot, according to the municipality. Despite the protection of the Iron Dome, 10 rockets scored direct hits on buildings — including a strike that killed a 5-year-old boy.

Sderot residents often use the word “resilience” when describing the community. And in many ways, Sderot appears to be thriving.

Once known as a dusty backwater in Israel’s Negev desert, it has evolved into a bustling town of some 27,000 people, with new apartment complexes and expensive villas seeming to pop up in any piece of open space. It has a heavily fortified train station linking it to major cities. There are shopping centers, bars and restaurants popular with students from a college in town.

Researchers say that people who grow up here tend to remain in the area as adults, out of pride and a strong connection to its tight-knit community.

Yaron Sasson, spokesman for the local government, said veteran residents and newcomers are drawn by special tax breaks, generous services made possible by government support and overseas donors as well as the small-town feel. At a time when much of the country is now within rocket range, he said Sderot is even seen as relatively safe, thanks to its many bomb shelters and reinforced schools and kindergartens.

Yet according to the trauma coalition, residents suffer from a wide range of symptoms. Teens suffer from higher rates of diabetes, aggression and hypertension than their counterparts in other communities.

Anxiety, depression, sleeping difficulties and general exhaustion are common symptoms among adults, and researchers only now are beginning to study the effects of growing up in Sderot on young parents’ child-rearing skills. Another question is how Sderot’s youths — who are frequently spooked by loud noises — can perform in the military, a compulsory rite of passage for most Jewish Israelis.

Dvora Biton said that whenever she goes out in the car, she plans a route that will take her past any of the dozens of bomb shelters scattered throughout town. The car window is always open, the volume on the radio is kept low and the pantry is filled with canned goods. Any loud sound, even a popping balloon, makes her jump.

“It’s something that you think about 24 hours a day,” she said. “You can’t escape it, even when you are sleeping.”

Fifteen years ago, before there was the Iron Dome, a rocket landed outside the family’s home, leaving a metal fragment embedded in her front door. Biton left the fragment in the door for years, only recently finding the strength to remove it during a home renovation.

“I wanted to leave it there as a reminder that we live in an unhealthy reality,” she said. “But on the other hand, there is a feeling you want to be released from these things.”

HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

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CORONAVIRUS PRECAUTIONS & SAFETY TIPS DON'T LOWER THE GUARD

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

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

WEAR A MASK

Always wear a mask to prevent droplets from going outside

GET A FLU VACCINATION

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

WASH YOUR HANDS

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

MAINTAIN SOCIAL DISTANCING

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

GET TESTED

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

COVER YOUR MOUTH & NOSE WHILE SNEEZING, OR COUGHING

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

FOLLOW PRECAUTIONS BEFORE STEPPING OUT

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

CHECK YOUR TEMPERATURE

Monitor your temperature on regular basis

Jane Withers, child actor turned commercial star, dies at 95

LOS ANGELES, AUG 10 (AP): Jane Withers, the former child actor who bedevilled Shirley Temple on the screen and went on to star in a series of B movies that made her a box-office champion, has died, her daughter said. She was 95.

Withers, also known as Josephine the Plumber from TV commercials in the 1960s and '70s, died Saturday, her daughter Kendall Errair said. Withers was one of the last remaining stars from the 1930s and 1940s, the height of Hollywood studio dominance.

After a series of minor roles as a child actress, Withers was cast by Twentieth Century-Fox in the 1934 Bright Eyes, as the nemesis of lovable Temple, then Hollywood's most popular star.

I had to play the meanest, creepiest little girl that God ever put on this planet, Withers recalled in 2000.

I ran over Shirley with a tricycle, and a baby buggy. And I thought, Oh dear, everybody's going to hate me forever because I was so creepy mean to Shirley Temple!

It didn't turn out that way. Critics claimed that she stole the picture from Shirley. Children wrote fan letters admiring what she did to Shirley because she's so perfect.

Fox boss Darryl F Zanuck figured there was room for another child actress at the studio, and she was signed to a contract. She played the anti-Shirley, a bright, talky,

mischief-prone girl with wide eyes, chubby cheeks and straight black hair that contrasted with Shirley's blonde curly top.



For four years, Fox ground out three or four Withers films annually at budgets far lower than the Temple specials. Among the titles: Ginger, Paddy O'Day, Little Miss Nobody, Wild and Woolly and Arizona Wildcat.

Even though B pictures were aimed for the bottom half of double bills, a theatre owners poll named Withers one of the top money-making stars in 1936 and 1937.

While the Temple films were made on Fox's modern Westwood lot, Withers made hers at the old studio on Sunset

Boulevard in Hollywood. I wasn't allowed to shoot in Westwood until Shirley left the studio, she said.

Withers proved less of a draw as a teenager, and her career dwindled.

As an adult she appeared in a few films and on television.

Her biggest prominence came from portraying Josephine in TV commercials for Comet cleanser for 12 years.

Oh, the money is nice, all right, she told the Los Angeles Times in 1963. I got five figures for eight of those commercials, and I'm doing four more.

The main advantage, she said, was that unlike the Broadway offers she was getting, the job didn't interfere with her home life in Hollywood.

She said in a later Times interview that she felt the original Josephine character was too smart-alecky, too brash, but she thought any lady who was going to become a plumber would take pride in her work and care about her customers.

Fame started early for Jane Withers. Born April 12, 1926, in Atlanta, she had appeared as Dixie's Dainty Dewdrop on local radio by the age of 3. Her mother had greater ambitions, and she persuaded her husband to move the family to Hollywood.

Jane played bit roles in movies and supplied voices for the Willie Whopper and the Looney Tunes cartoons.

Her experience with W.C. Fields in It's a Gift (1934) belies the legend encouraged by Fields himself that the comedian hated children. Fields chose her for a scene in which she played hopsotch in front of his store, frustrating his exit. He coached her and afterward praised her professional-

ism. When she won her first starring role, he sent her two large bouquets and a note saying, I know you're going to knock them dead in 'Ginger' and you're going to have a fantastic career.

Her popularity led to Jane Withers dolls and other merchandise. At her peak, she was earning 2,500 a week and 50,000 a year in endorsements. Unlike other child stars, her earnings did not disappear.

She explained in 1974: Fortunately, my dad had a great love of California land. He kind of dabble-dabbled in real estate in a marvelous way.

During her childhood she started collecting dolls and teddy bears, and she continued throughout her lifetime. In 1988 she reported that she owned 12,000 dolls and 2,500 teddy bears which were boxed and crated in a 27,000-square-foot warehouse.

Withers' film appearances as an adult were sporadic, partly because of three marriages and five children. Her most notable credits were Giant (1956) and Captain Newman, M.D. (1963).

In 1947, Withers left Hollywood to live with her first husband, producer-oil man William Moss, in Midland, Texas. The marriage produced three children and ended after seven years.

She returned to Hollywood and was paralyzed with arthritis. She recovered after spending five months in a hospital.

Cinema plays an important role in showing nationalism: Akshay Kumar

MUMBAI, AUG 10 (PTI): Bollywood superstar Akshay Kumar believes the unsung heroes of the country deserve praise for their service, which he says is the highlight of his upcoming release "Bell Bottom".

In the 1980s-set spy thriller based on true events, the 53-year-old actor plays an intelligence agent with code-name 'Bell Bottom' who spearheads the mission to rescue 210 hostages from a hijacked Indian plane

Asked if unsung heroes are the new face of nationalism via movies, Kumar said, "Cinema does play an important role in showing nationalism."

"It is essential that we tell everyone about these people who do so much for the country, the risk they take. I am glad I got the opportunity to be part of 'Bell Bottom' which is about an unsung hero," the National Award-winner told PTI in an interview.

"Bell Bottom" joins the long list of Kumar's films which blends high octane stunts, synonymous with the actor's action star status, and patriotic fervour following titles like Holiday, Baby, Air-lift, Kesari, and Mission Mangal.

With this film, I would like the audience to see and understand the life of an agent, who are unsung heroes and how they work selflessly for the country without expecting anything in return. And how he goes unnoticed. It is a great life and people should know about them.

Asked about his views on nationalism, the actor said, What I believe about nationalism I show it onscreen through films and that is what I want to say about nationalism.

As the contribution of many heroes goes unnoticed, it is imperative they are celebrated through films, he added.

They are the unsung heroes and even if there is more glorification being shown, then I don't see any problem in that. I feel it shouldn't be less, if it is more than it is ok. They deserve praise.

It is not that he enjoys playing unsung heroes more in cinema, said the actor, who averages three to four movies a year.

I enjoy every space. I have played this man who stands in support of women in Toilet: EkPrem Katha' and Padman', an out-and-out comedy role in Houseful' and then



played a transgender in Laxmii'. So, I have not restricted myself to playing particular kinds of roles.

For "Bell Bottom", the actor said, he has tried to make the character a bit glossy to make it entertaining for the audience.

The film is about this mission and how these men saved the lives of several people. These undercover agents are very normal people. They are not like James Bond, they do things in a very raw and real manner.

Like, my character is not someone jumping from one building to another. Since, this is a real story, things are done in a logical way. But we have tried to make it a little big and commercial (by adding some fantasy). However, 80 per cent of the story is real, Kumar added.

Bell Bottom happens to be the first film to be shot amid the pandemic last

year and Kumar is grateful to the producers for shooting the film during COVID-19 in the UK.

"We didn't face any difficulty. The credit goes to the producers to take the crew of more than 200 people to shoot over there but with all the necessary protocols. They took the risk to do something unbelievable, he said.

It is also the first Hindi movie to release on August 19 in 3D and 2D after the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

Though cinema halls in many parts of the country have reopened with 50 per cent capacity, Maharashtra, which contributes a major chunk to the overall business of Bollywood, continues to remain shut.

But for Kumar, the bigger joy is the arrival of Bell Bottom on the big screen.

"It's been two years and we haven't seen anything in theatres. It's about time that people come to watch movies but with necessary protocols as suggested by the government. We just hope it never closes down again, he said, adding, he hopes cinema operations resume in Maharashtra too.

His other film "Sooryavanshi", a cop drama, is still awaiting theatrical release since March 2020 but Kumar said there is nothing much that he can do in the current scenario.

"We don't know what is going to happen. I don't have any answer. I am not the only one facing this difficulty, everyone in the industry is. There are so many people who are facing such big difficulties and my difficulties are nothing in front of them."

The actor also has films like period drama "Prithviraj", musical romance "Atrangi Re", action comedy "Bachchan-Pandey", comedy drama "RakshaBandhan", and action-adventure drama "Ram Setu" in the pipeline.



PURPLE PIAZZZ! The actress, Rita Ora is a showstopper in a colorful outfit on the streets of Paris.

Aries:

It's a back-to-basics kind of day, Aries. We're under the influence of the waning moon, which makes this an excellent time to work on new things and strengthen the foundation of what you have already built. The latter requires your immediate attention today. Remember to focus on long-term results as you do. Shortcuts will only get you "this" far, beautiful.

Tip: Strengthen the foundation.

Taurus:

Today brings with itself the reminder that you're never too old to go back to your books. What are the things that you feel called to understand on a deeper level? Let self-study lead the way forward. The thing with the law of attraction is that it automatically aligns you with people and events who are at the same vibration. So, be open to answers that are coming to you through unexpected sources. The only way to be receptive is by keeping your ego out of the equation.

Tip: Turn your knowledge into wisdom.

Gemini:

The new moon and the Lion's Gate portal may have passed us by, but we're still under the influence of its magic. Word for the wise: harness this energy wisely. Sow the seeds of what you wish to see blossom in your reality. As you do, understand the law of divine timing too.

It's not your job to try and control the outcome of things. You simply need to show up for what you love with surrender in your heart. There is a larger plan at play, beloved, a plan that is looking out for you now and in every moment.

Tip: Show up for what you love as you keep affirming the good.

Cancer:

The new moon in Leo is bringing in all kinds of good juju into your life. It's also helping you make space for love and laughter, and appreciate all that is blessed and beautiful. You've been taking everything "too" seriously, haven't you, Cancer? And now you're being called to change the game around for the better. So, approach everything you do with the spirit of play as you remember that your happiness is the ultimate offering to the divine forces.

Tip: Stay in the energy of play.

Leo:

When things don't go our way, we tend to descend into a downward spiral. We are quick to adopt the failure narrative. But, this doesn't serve us in any way, Leo. The only thing it does is magnify the negatives. So, just for today, focus on what is blessed and beautiful. Give the good more power even if it makes you feel delusional. Before you know it, your outer reality will begin to match your

inner vibration.

Tip: Affirm the good even if it feels unnatural in the beginning.

Virgo:

What you're experiencing right now is the dark night of the soul, Virgo. A time when things that are sacred to you are being taken away in an unexpected manner. But, your soul knows. Your soul always knows that rejection is merely redirection. That everything is taking place in divine order. So, embrace the discomfort. Embrace that feeling of emptiness too as you remember the mantra, 'This too shall pass'.

Tip: Sit down with that feeling of emptiness too.

Libra:

Want more freedom in your life? First things first, Libra. Ask yourself if you are following the chosen path because it is in alignment with your soul purpose or because it is what is expected of you. As you do, begin to eliminate the weight of other people's expectations, even if that makes you feel uncomfortable temporarily. Let the journey to yourself begin today, beautiful.

Tip: Run wild. Run free. It's time to find your true freedom, beautiful.

Scorpio:

The trouble is, you've been waiting on the big things to manifest. As a result, you have been avoiding the little

things that make your life oh-so-beautiful. What are these things, Scorpio, and how are you being called to organise them? Approaching the tasks in front of you with the precision of a Zen master is what is required of you. There is magic in the mundane, beautiful. It all comes down to where you choose to vibrate at.

Tip: Get organised! Period.

Sagittarius:

Every person and experience we attract is meant to teach us something. A soul lesson that helps us make our way out of the muddy waters and move towards that desired state of ananda or bliss. So, pay attention to what your circumstances are revealing to you as you turn your knowledge into wisdom. The cards are also reminding you that our soul age has nothing to do with the age of this physical body. The answers you seek could come through those who are seemingly younger than you. Keeping your ego aside will help you be receptive to what the Universe wants to send your way.

Tip: The answers you seek could come to you in the most unexpected of ways.

Capricorn:

Think of this as a period of metamorphosis. A period of shedding the old skin that does not serve who you are transforming into today. The urge to cling onto the old will be strong, Capricorn. Get comfortable with the uncomfortable nonetheless, as you remember that this discomfort

is a part of the evolution process. Remember, there is no shift within that does not have a ripple effect without. So, prepare for change in your external reality too as you remember that everything is taking place in alignment with your highest good.

Tip: It's time to shed some old skin, Capricorn.

Aquarius:

They say when one door closes, another one opens for you—a Universal truth that you are about to witness first hand, Aquarius. Observe the green light you are receiving and where it is leading you towards. Even though things are seemingly topsy-turvy in your world, you are being led towards something bigger. So, trust the plan. Trust the plan, beautiful, and know that you are moving in the direction of your highest good.

Tip: Forward and onwards!

Pisces:

The cards are talking about the sweet results that are on their way to you, beautiful. Sweet results that are affirming the importance of putting in the work. That's right, Pisces. There are no shortcuts. No quick fixes that can transform your reality overnight. But, as long as you co-create in harmony with Spirit and your fellow warriors, you will always be able to call in the energy of miracles into your life.

Tip: Co-create with Spirit as you hold the vision of what you are creating in your mind's eye.